

Dear Mr. Greenburg,

3/19/18

Thank you for sharing *The Amazing True Adventures of Ben Franklin's Cat* with me. I greatly enjoyed reading this clever, historical account of Benjamin Franklin's life through the eyes of his snarky cat, Missy. She was such a pleasure to spend time with and she literally made me laugh out loud. What you have here is a very solid foundation for an absolutely fabulous book for elementary readers that will be both entertaining and educational. Your book has the potential to be even better than it already is. I'm honored to help take your book to the next level.

I've highlighted the areas in your m.s. where your story is strongest, and some areas where there's room for improvement. I've included some suggestions to help guide you in the right direction without losing your unique voice.

Some parts I really enjoyed were the exchanges between Missy and Ben when talking about how to improve Philadelphia, but possibly my favorite scene is when Ben is telling people that they have to give up goods produced in London like their quince jellies, and then they suppose giving up tea is okay. It's subtle foreshadowing to the night of the Boston Tea Party, and it's a nice touch in addition to being hilarious.

## **Overall Impressions**

I love the witty banter between Ben and Missy. It shows how comfortable they are with each other, and that they have developed a friendship strong enough to keep them together for life. I can see why a friendship with Ben would also be beneficial to Missy. Ben provides food and shelter, but I wonder what about Missy that draws her to Ben. Does he like the attention she gives him by asking him lots of questions about himself? Does he like having her around, he must, but I think it would enhance the story by putting a larger focus on Missy and Ben's friendship, and make it clear that they are best friends and show appreciation for one another.

This ties in to some other minor concerns with character development and portrayal. As it stands, Debby is a plot device, and not a fully fleshed out character. As the only human woman in the story, it'd be nice to see her get more worthy story time.

There is some rapid pacing in parts, then slows down dramatically chapter by chapter. If you balance the pacing it will keep readers from losing interest when the pace slows.

Setting is one of the weakest areas of the m.s., and I will be discussing it heavily in the following pages. The biggest problem is that there isn't much of it, making your story difficult to visualize most of the time. Ebenezer's letter was the easiest scene to picture, and it wasn't even happening in story time. Your readers will want to see Missy and Ben's interactions, and not just hear them. For instance, in chapter 6, you could show us Ben making his inventions, and include dates so we know the chronological order. For example, Missy tries to use the grabber to get a book about cooking fish. Readers will enjoy and appreciate a visual picture. Right now, the story is mostly a series of conversations, albeit entertaining ones, but they don't give readers a clear picture of what is happening. Your story has plenty of content, which is a wonderful thing to have, and doesn't have to live entirely in dialogue. Missy and Ben are interesting characters

and it'd be fun to see them act out more of the story, and it will help to further engage readers too.

There are some historical inaccuracies that we can fix easily. I know it is a top priority for you that your story be one-hundred percent accurate. This can be difficult, since not everything that Ben Franklin is known for is positive. He wasn't perfect, and he doesn't need to be painted that way, and these can be chances for Missy to ground him. As a cat, Missy is in a unique position to provide objective insight into the questionable actions of some of the characters and scenes in the story, such as the rebel colonists dressing up like Native Americans, and James beating Ben.

The following sections will expand on what I've touched on here, and I've attempted to order them in a way that is clear. I've provided examples and suggestions to help guide your revision process.

## **Characters**

**Ben:** Inquisitive, egotistical, gluttonous are the main adjectives that stick out in my mind after reading the manuscript. Ben's character really helps to push the plot along because he loves to talk about himself so much. He gives Missy plenty of material for her book. Ben is a generally likable character, although there are some instances where he doesn't come across as very nice, such as when Missy is complaining about how hungry she is in chapter 7 and Ben just ignores her. There are some things we find out about him in the story that would be fun to see. For instance, he is a musician but we never see him playing anything, not even his glass armonica. On page 41, Missy speaks of this: "Ben was a fine musician. He played the violin, the harp, and the guitar." It's also a way to incorporate more setting. In chapter 6, Ben retires and says, "Now it's time to have some fun." By fun, he means learning Spanish and Greek, not something many young readers would consider entertainment, but Ben's idea of fun shows the inquisitive side of his character. Plus, young readers might find it silly and chuckle, while also learning who he was as a person.

**Missy:** Sassy, sarcastic, and narcissistic, Missy is cat stereotypes personified, making her a character that is memorable and entertaining. She has a big personality, and you represent it well as soon as we meet her in her foreword, which sets her tone for the rest of the story. We get a great sense of who she is on page 12 when she's talking about her upbringing: "I had my books, I had my writing, and I had my collection of miniature mouse skulls, and that was quite enough for me." This says so much about her in one sentence, and it also illustrates that like other cats, she's a hunter, but something unusual about her is that she is a cat who reads and writes. There are some instances where she seems out of character, such as on page 7 when she's talking to Ben about including embarrassing moments of cats in the *Philadelphia Feline*. "That one happens to all of us, of course. It's just fun to see a cat admit it in print." Missy is so prideful and has such a big ego that it seems strange she'd admit to doing embarrassing things. One way to rephrase this would be for Missy to say something like, "Not that *I* would ever do such things."

**Fluffy and the Hoopers:** I think it could be a lot of fun to have Fluffy pop back up. If not, as enjoyable as it is to hear Missy's backstory, the backstory on the family isn't really relevant, and chapter three could potentially be the darling you'll have to kill. But I do think it's worth saving if you chose to incorporate characters like Fluffy and Mama Hooper, or you could bring back Missy's siblings one by one later on in the story. They could be scattered throughout the colonies, with Buffy in Boston, and Obadiah finds his way to London and sees Missy there. Fluffy could be living with the Penns and writing her own biography of William Penn. Since they were rivals as kittens, they could be rivals again by writing biographies of rivals Ben and Penn. If Missy's siblings are also the rare *Catus longevicus* breed, it would explain how they can also live a long time and be around for important historical events like Missy. With this chapter in the story, it makes me wonder what happened to them and where they are now. Was Missy living with the rest of the Hoopers before she moved in with Ben? It's a very funny chapter that helps us get to know Missy, but other than that, it's not relevant to the rest of the story, unless you did decide to bring back some or all of Missy's siblings in some way. They could easily stand in for fictional characters like Ebenezer or even Ichabod Pudding. Ichabod even asks Missy in chapter 8 why it's so important for Missy to include information about her family in Ben's life story.

**Ichabod Pudding:** This is such an excellent and memorable character name, but as for the character itself there is room for improvement. Despite Ichabod's connections to the FHS, he seems to pop up out of the blue and serves as more of a plot device than a character. One way to alleviate this is to have one of Missy's siblings stand in for Ichabod, such as Fluffy, therefore linking back to chapter three and creating a logical subplot.

**Deborah Read:** She serves mainly as a plot device as it stands. She is the character you feel sorry for so it's hard to believe she'd aim a gun at a fiery mob. I think there are many ways to flesh out Debby's character and give her some personality and spark, and make us believe she'd really grab that gun and aim it at people. The real Deborah Franklin oversaw Ben's businesses while he was in London. There are instances in the story already that hint that Debby was a competent woman. In chapter 10 on page 38, when Ben is telling Debby about the situation with the Penns, he doesn't talk down to her but speaks to her as his equal. From Missy, we also know that Debby was a cat lover and they spent time together. But it's described a bit problematically in chapter 5 on page 20: "Debbie and I spent many a happy evening batting a crumpled ball of paper across the living room floor." This makes it sound like Debby really is a simpleton because she enjoys batting balls around like a cat. A better way to phrase this would be to say that Debby batted the ball for Missy to play with. You could also show Debby's love for Missy with affectionate pets and cuddles. Maybe one of Missy's favorite places is to sit in Debby's lap.

**William:** William is present frequently throughout the story, but we never get a description of him. It's also difficult to keep track of how old he is. During the kite scene, Ben seems to ignore William's presence and talk only to Missy. Another issue with

William is his questionable maternity and how to introduce it to young readers. One way you could explain William's maternity is saying something like, "Ben's son William came to live with Ben and Debby, and Debby greeted William with open arms and loved him as if he were her own son." It may have been a scandal back then, but today family structures are incredibly diverse. I think you'll have some readers who'll look at William living with his father and stepmother and see themselves. Not every reader will relate, but for the ones that do, it will mean a lot to them to see their family life being represented, so I don't think you should shy away from this opportunity, but instead embrace it.

**Ralph:** Ralph the dog shows up early and then disappears so giving him a name is not necessary.

**The House of Commons Characters:** Because each of these characters have only a few lines in the entire m.s., it's not necessary to give them names. It's okay for them to simply be voices in the crowd. I love this scene and what they say is hysterically funny, but plugging up scenes with unnecessary names may confuse readers later on. Reserve naming characters for those that will play a bigger role in the story so it's easier for young readers to keep track of them.

## **Setting**

Because setting is sparse throughout the story, it's difficult to imagine where the characters are. Readers will want to see these exciting events happening and may have trouble following along, especially with Ben going back and forth between Philadelphia and London so much, it's hard to keep track of where him and Missy are at any given time. It's mentioned in the foreword that cats use their claws to write with, but then we only see Missy doing this once while she's interviewing Ben. There are several chapters that are composed entirely of dialogue, such as chapter 2. Where are Missy and Ben? Do people see them talking? Do other people know about their friendship and communication? Does Missy like to be pet or held? Ears scratched? Does Missy have her ink and quill here? I keep wondering where they are, and so will readers. Set your characters in a place when each chapter begins so readers can get a sense of where they are. You could do this by describing Ben's house, certain rooms like the library, or roaming about Philadelphia. The roof scene in chapter 7 is effective because it's so easy to picture, and hilarious too.

## **Chapter 5**

Some setting here would greatly enhance this chapter. Missy and Ben talk about a lot so there is plenty of content. You don't need to heavily describe everything, but a couple more sentences setting the scene will help readers visualize the scene. On page 22, when Missy says Ben started the first hospital, you could describe what the hospital is like. Was it one room or several? How many stories was the building? On page 23, you can describe the police officers--what did they wear back then? Did they carry batons?

## **Chapter 6**

The famous Kite scene: This is probably one of the things that Ben is most known for to younger people and I think it should definitely get its own separate chapter. There are already some excellent descriptions here but there could be even more, as it happens very quickly. Drawing out the scenes will build tension leading up to the lightning discovery. Some questions I had were, how old is William in this chapter? Is Missy really this tolerant of water?

## **Chapter 8**

Pg. 35: In the beginning of the chapter, Missy is trying to write with her claws by dipping them into an inkwell but makes a mess so Ben gives her a bowl to use for the ink instead. This is a funny moment, and hearkens back to the foreword. Seeing Missy trying to write with her claws could also happen earlier in the story, such as when she's first interviewing Ben in chapter 2. This is a fun detail that enhances the overall quality of your storytelling.

## **Chapter 11**

Pg. 40: Missy dines with Ben and friends in London and sits at the table with them. It'd be funny to include people's reactions to this as it is so silly and fun to imagine. Is Missy really just sitting at the table with everyone and nobody cares?

## **Scene vs. Summary**

This section is closely related to setting and I mostly discuss chapter six where you're summarizing Ben's inventions instead of showing them in the story. When you write such descriptions as, "Ben laughs uproariously", this is an example of something you could show by describing how Ben laughs instead of telling us. Chapter 8 is a great example of setting the scene and providing context without being overly descriptive: "It was a warm summer's day. I was bounding through a field of tall weeds in back of Ben's house." Right off the bat, place is established and readers know where they are.

## **Chapter 6**

Overall, chapter six is a great chance to do a lot more showing. You could even break up some of the more notable inventions into separate chapters, such as electricity and the lightning rod. Your readers will be interested to know how Ben's inventions work and elaborating on them will bring clarity and include more historical facts too. For example, readers will be curious to know how the security mirrors work. We don't get to know much else besides who invented it. The library chair invention is another example of a potential fun and educational scene. For instance, Missy could be trying to reach a book about mice or fish and struggles to reach it. Ben watches laughing before offering to help, and this gives him the idea for the library chair. Describing Ben's inventions with antidotes is a great way that you can include the other characters, such as Debby, whose appearance adds some humor to the lightning rod/roof scene of chapter seven.

Pg. 26: Missy asks Ben why it's always so cold in the house so you could show how cold it is. Is Missy wearing her mittens? Describe Missy as being cold—even her fur can't keep her warm during Philly winters.

Pg. 28: Instead of summarizing what happened on Ben's daily walks, show Ben on a walk and getting the idea for fertilizer. Maybe Missy is with him and she sees Ralph the dog again and he's eating some grass. The same goes for Ben's lead paint/plumbing discovery. Answer the why and how of these discoveries in your descriptions of them. Your readers will gain a clear, mental image, and it will help to better understand why these discoveries were so important in history.

Pg. 28 When Ben discovers that painters and plumbers get sick from lead in paint and pipes, the description ends. What happened after? What did Ben do aside from making the discovery? Including just a little more information will prevent readers from being left with unanswered questions.

## **Chapter 7**

When you describe Ben's electric shock trick, you could show an example of Ben shocking someone instead of summarizing it. Ben could visit his brother James and shake his hand, or Ben shocks Missy, which could make for a fun scene. Debby could even teach Ben a lesson by tricking him into getting shocked. "You can't just go around shocking people!" This is a perfect opportunity for showing scenes instead of just telling us about it. The possibilities for showing are endless, and you have plenty of wonderful content to work with.

## **Plot**

The unique, magical, yet historical plot is at the heart of what drives your story. Missy and Ben's friendship is such a fun way to give children a history lesson. Your choice to have the clever plot be linear is a wise one and allows the story to form some natural organization. There are some instances, such as chapter 6, where you list many of Ben's inventions without including any dates in a fast-paced manner that could possibly lose your readers. Even if he did invent them all within a short time period, including dates is still helpful to keep readers on track, especially since your goal is to educate them.

I love the subtle but effective foreshadowing that is peppered throughout the m.s. Missy asks Ben in chapter 2 on page 11, "Why did you want a kite to pull you?" The mention of the word alone hints at what's yet to come. It's so quietly and brilliantly effective. There are some great examples of foreshadowing to the creation of the United States too, such as page 15, when Ben says, "England insists on selling us all things like printing presses themselves to make sure we don't get too independent." And on page 36, when Missy explains that "by writing up this paper Ben had actually invented the United States of America!" This foreshadowing enhances the plot by reminding readers of Ben's ultimate achievement still to come. They will want to keep reading just to see the United States become what it is. You could even consider dropping more subtle hints like these ones to really keep readers enthralled.

## **On the Forewords**

Because of the fantastical nature of this book and the goal of it being to educate, I think having forewords are effective ways to set up the story of Missy and Ben. They allow readers to know a little about the world of Missy and her place beside Ben Franklin before diving into the story. I think the forewords could be even more effective with some restructuring and small additions. For example, the author foreword could explain more about what the Feline Historical Society is and when it was founded, and leave the details like how cats can write to Missy. It seems awkwardly placed within the author's foreword and could work better in Missy's foreword instead. She is the one writing after all, and it would fit in nicely along the passage about the *Catus longevicus* breed. The author could instead mention more about his own cats. For instance, he could say something like, "I tried to ask them about the Feline Historical Society but they ignored me and just kept sleeping." There are many ways to incorporate the author's cats. Or else, readers may wonder why it is important for the author to tell us he has cats of his own and what they look like. Are they distant relatives to the Hoopers? Did his cats supply him with a copy of Missy's story? Also, it seems odd how nonchalant he is about hearing about the FHS, so perhaps he could express some shock about finding out about it. I question the purpose of the last sentence of the author foreword that explains how to get a copy of Missy's story. We already have it, so there's no need to contact the FHS, unless there is something about the FHS and Missy that we don't know.

## **Chapter 9**

The chapter begins with Missy and Ben leaving to find out why the mail is so slow, but then the chapter veers off, and why the mail is slow is never addressed again. The following chapter then begins with Missy describing how Ben has improved the promptness of the mail system without connecting back to Missy and Ben's unrevealed discovery. This results in chapter nine feeling unfinished. The scene where Missy and Ben trick everyone in the Inn to go outside in order to snag spots by the fireplace is hilarious but it shouldn't end there, as it doesn't explain why the mail is so slow. I suggest adding another scene in this chapter where you explain how Missy and Ben discovered why the mail was so slow.

## **Debby's Letter**

In chapter on page 45, Missy explains how Debby wrote to Ben about the mob showing up at her house and then explains the contents of the letter, but perhaps it would be better explained by Debby herself. It could allow her character to shine if we heard this exciting scene from her point of view. It would also create a letter theme if you chose to keep the Boston Tea Party scene in Ebenezer's letter.

## **Ebenezer's Letter**

Since Ebenezer Fortas is not a real person and his letter only serves one purpose—to describe the night of the Boston Tea Party, his character is not necessary. The letter could be from Fluffy instead in a way to keep her character relevant. Another possible solution would be to have Sam Adams himself write to Ben. This is an exciting event,

and a well-written, detailed scene, that could perhaps be more effective if it didn't happen in a letter, but I understand the issue of logistics. That is another reason why it could be fun to have the letter come from Fluffy. It could play into her rivalry with Missy too, as she could rub it in Missy's face that she was there and not Missy.

### **Boston Tea Party**

This is an exciting scene and may be more powerful written in action as opposed to the letter form it currently lives in. Perhaps Missy and Ben read about the events in the news and describe what happened to each other or to Debby. Providing some historical context would also help solve the matter of the rebels dressing up as Native Americans, which readers may recognize as cultural appropriation. Native Americans are not mentioned until this point but they were a big part of history at this time so you could make their existence known by providing explanation as to who the Mohawks are before the night of the Tea Party. Missy, as a cat and not a person, is in a good position to be objective. How does she view relations between tribes and colonists? Does she gawk at the rebels dressing up like the Mohawks?

### **Organization/Structure**

The story is well-organized for the most part, with a linear plot that works well for this type of historical book, however there are some areas that could be restructured to benefit the narrative. For instance, I think the kite scene would be much stronger as its own chapter instead of lumped in with all the inventions mentioned in chapter six.

### **Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 flies by very quickly as it happens entirely in dialogue between Ben and Missy, so including some setting details will help to slow the pacing and allow readers to better process what is happening here. You don't need to write lengthy descriptions to be effective, but a describing what's going on around them in a few extra sentences here and there will give readers more to picture than a cat and a human having a conversation. No matter how funny the conversation is, something still needs to happen to keep young readers' attentions. Where are Ben and Missy having this interview? In public with spectators? In the kitchen at Ben's house while Missy laps up a bowl of milk?

### **Chapter 4**

This chapter is long compared to the others and covers a lot of info, so it could easily be broken up into at least two shorter chapters. One way to do this is to end the chapter after Ben and Missy talk about starting a library. The next chapter would begin in 1731 with Ben publishing his first almanac.

### **Chapter 6**

The pacing in this chapter is very different from what we've read so far, with inventions being explained in rapid-fire succession. For example, in half a page, Ben invents a stove, a clock, a handshake buzzer, a machine that copied letters, daylight savings time, and more. You could easily draw some of them out a bit, and really give readers a sense of what Franklin did. Sally and William Franklin are also mentioned in this chapter and

it feels very out of place. Instead of interspersing family mentions, one possible solution is that to write one chapter devoted solely to Ben's family, with Missy there to address tough topics like William's maternity and Frankie's death.

## **Logic**

Addressing minor logical concerns in the story will help to formulate the plot. One way to approach this is to ask basic questions about the characters. For example, how old is Missy? Is she a member of the *Catus* breed that lives ninety years, and that's how she is able to recount Ben's entire life? You could have Ben remark on her age: "You're living quite longer than normal cats." Ben is a curious person, so it makes sense for him to ask more questions.

## **Chapter 1**

We see Missy in action in the first chapter when she explains she's wearing mittens because she burned her paws on a hot stove. Whose hot stove? Did Missy have previous owners? Where did she live? Did she leave a family for Ben? Kids, especially ones with their own family cats, may question her going to live with Ben. The hot stove implies she lived in a house, or at least, was in one at some point. Did her former owners make her mittens for her? It's a chance to add backstory about Missy that is immediately relevant to the rest of the story, and also addresses the small plot hole that is why Missy is so eager to live with Ben and vice versa.

## **Chapter 2**

"An Apple a day keeps the doctor away." This saying is from after Ben Franklin's time so I suggest using a different **aphorism** in the interest of maintaining historical accuracy, which I know is your prime goal, or at least finding a way to differentiate between the actual aphorisms Ben is known for, and the ones that came later. This is a fun conversation that can remain so even with a simple switch. Your use of aphorisms in the story provide humor while also teaching children what they are. I especially enjoyed the scissors one in chapter 5.

On page 7, when Missy is talking to Ben about her paper she mentions that her "readers" would be interested in Ben's life story, which implies she already has them, but we never see Missy interacting with other cats. Ben could be asking her more questions. He is an inquisitive person as you well know. He seems to accept a lot of the things she says, even the more outlandish ones. On page 8, Missy talks about who she was walking the day she was born. I'm guessing that she is exaggerating and Ben could counter her by saying something like, "Cats don't learn to walk that fast." Ben defying Missy can make for fun and humor. On page 8 Ben says "My father wanted me to become a minister, so he put me in Latin school." It might not be totally clear to your young readers what the connection is between becoming a minister and going to Latin school. I suggest describing how Latin relates to religion to give clarity. Perhaps you could mention that Ben will be able to read prayers in Latin.

## Chapter 5

Pg. 24: The *Philadelphia Feline*: “Many cats bought copies.” Could any of these cats be Missy’s siblings? I think this would be a great opportunity for Missy to get a letter from one of her siblings. Even the stern and cold Hooper matriarch could write Missy saying she’s proud of her, or criticise Missy a little and tell her that her paper needs improving.

Pg. 25-26: Smallpox vaccine was not invented until after Ben Franklin’s death, so Frankie couldn’t have died from not being able to get vaccinated.

## Chapter 7

When Missy and Ben are on the roof and Missy suggests to Ben that he use his technique of throwing off his voice in order to convince Debby that they aren’t on the roof, he uses it but how the technique works is never described. This is a fun scene and described in detail for the most part, and showing what Ben’s voice throwing technique is will only enhance it. Young readers will be curious about this one in particular because it’s something they could try on their own, or together as a fun classroom activity.

## Chapter 11

Pg. 40: Missy enrolls in bird and mouse watching in London and I wondered where and if it was with other cats. Is there an underground cat school in London? Schools were not very common at the time for anyone. You could have Missy going to a park and meeting other cats where the classes are more like group activities. There are several ways to expand on this.

## Writing Style

Your writing has a wonderful flow and natural rhythm to it that moves the story along seamlessly, but there are some things like your frequent use of italics and some of your word choices that disrupt the flow of the narrative.

### Italics

Italics are used frequently throughout the course of the story, and while they can be effective in providing emphasis, overuse can take away the effect and result in exhausting the reader. The last thing you want is to bog them down. One example of where it distracts is on page 40, when “George” is italicized but not “King.” In chapter 10, Debby’s “yes” and “no” come across firmly enough without the italics. You could reserve italics for Missy and other cats, or just Missy and Ben. An example of overuse is in chapter 2 when Missy and Ben have their first interview and Ben is explaining his family background: “Not only was I my father’s youngest son, but my father was *his* father’s youngest son. And my grandfather was *his* father’s youngest son. And my *great* grandfather...” and so it continues. The italics are necessary for the Cattish words, and useful when Ben is teaching Missy boating terms, and they also add humor to your dialogue, but again, overuse takes away their meaning. Be picky about which words you choose to italicize so they get their full effect each time.

## Chapter 8

Pg. 35: Missy's has a thought bubble in italics. This is the only time we see Missy's thoughts expressed this way, and it was a bit distracting. To alleviate this, decide how you would like to express Missy's thoughts and be consistent.

### Word Choice and Language

**Mohawks vs. Indians:** A better word choice for "indians" would be to name the specific tribe being alluded to, which is the Mohawks. Even if "indians" is what was said back then, it doesn't need to be that way now as using Mohawks is still historically accurate. Native Americans is another choice, but since Ben hadn't invented American yet, it could be a confusing term.

### Use of Pronouns

You might want to consider using "they" and "them" pronouns at the end of chapter 2 when Ben is telling Missy about the book he read on how to argue. Using a neutral pronoun will prevent alienating female and non-binary readers. You could also consider it as a way to help end the idea that "him" is all-encompassing for your young readers and future leaders of the world. It's a small change that could have a powerful impact.

**Governor Keith/Sir William:** You flip back and forth between the two names throughout your m.s., and I suggest sticking to one name to maintain clarity and consistency. I recommend sticking with Governor Keith to avoid readers confusing him with William Franklin.

### Chapter 2: James and "beating"

There are some tough topics addressed in this chapter that could be approached with slightly more sensitivity in an effort to avoid turning off readers, (and their parents too). For instance, when Ben is telling Missy about how his brother James use to beat him while he was working for James as a printer's apprentice, the language and tone get very dark. "Beating" is a very intense word that may be too harsh for your young readers. There are other words you could try switching it out for, such as "punish". This aspect of Ben's life doesn't need to be sugar-coated, as it's not necessarily bad to scare kids. It can be good for them in order to gain perspective, but I would consider other options for the word choice here. As I've stated previously, Missy is in a viable position to provide objective viewpoints. Missy could make comments to lighten the mood. One idea is having Missy mention how her and her siblings fought often when they were kittens, but that they wouldn't hit each other now, "Well, *maybe*" says Missy. Or she could ask Ben why he doesn't stick up for himself against his bully brother? Readers will at least appreciate Missy sticking up for Ben. "Your brother sounds terrible" is another thing she could say to voice her disapproval.

## **Chapter 5: Debby the Simpleton**

pg. 25: “Debbie was a simple woman who barely knew how to read or write.” Calling Debby a simpleton will turn off readers, especially female readers. Parents won’t approve of their kids seeing this stereotype being reinforced either. This can be an opportunity to change the stereotype that men were smarter than women. I may have grown up in a time where this was seen as acceptable or brushed over, but today’s kids don’t have to. It’s also fact that Debby oversaw Ben’s affairs while he was overseas and ran a store, something that you do touch on by mentioning Debby’s shop more than once.

## **Dialogue**

Ben and Missy’s witty exchanges are fun and light-hearted, and I found your dialogue to be strong throughout the m.s. What they say is consistently in character for the most part, such as when Ben and Missy are at the Inn trying to find out why the mail is so slow. Ben asks for New England clam chowder and Missy then asks for New England rat chowder. It’s so funny and just the sort of thing you’d expect them to say. Another one of my favorites that will make kids laugh is in chapter 5 on page 20 when Ben tells Missy “Minds and underwear should be changed every week . . .” and her response is, “Is that an aphorism?” “It is *now*,” replies Ben. Through their fun exchanges, we see them become good friends. But there are a few instances where they seem to speak out of character, and I’ve noted them for you in the following examples.

## **Chapter 6**

During the kite scene, Ben only talks to Missy and doesn’t address his own son, who Missy mentions is present. It’s said that William was with Ben when he made this discovery, so he should be addressed in some way. If the reason Ben is ignoring William is because of a strained family life, that should be expressed in the story before this scene. On page 27, Missy asks Ben “Why *not* burn your candle at both ends?” and this question seems out of character for Missy. She is generally smarter than this and the answer is too obvious. When Missy contradicts Ben about the kite and the electricity, he just laughs instead of acknowledging it, which seem unlikely and out of character for him too. Why does Ben have nothing to say in return to this? It’s one of his greatest accomplishments and it’s worth defending.

## **Chapter 8**

At the end of the chapter, when Ichabod is telling Missy the FHS will be expecting the first chapters of Ben’s biography, she doesn’t respond and it doesn’t seem like Missy since she usually has the last word in any conversation. A sarcastic response such as, “Thanks, but I don’t need luck” is one way Missy could get her last word in.

## **Cattish**

The Cattish is fun but it can also be distracting because the words that Missy and Ichabod use are always different. This makes it difficult to remember what any of the Cattish means. It is helpful that Missy always translates for us, but I think the Cattish

would be more effective if you picked a few specific words and phrases and then have Missy use them consistently enough that they are recognizable. You already do this with “*Gracko*.” Another option would be to omit Cattish altogether, as it doesn’t serve to move the plot along. But a good start is simplifying the language and using the same Cattish words that are easy for young readers to remember and even repeat them outside the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you again for sharing *The True Amazing Adventures of Ben Franklin’s Cat* with me. The blending of the fantastical and the historical is an effective and entertaining way to educate children on U.S. history. I’m blown away by your creativity in thinking up the Feline Historical Society. Your book has the potential to be a series of biographies written by the cats of historical figures. I greatly enjoyed reading it, and I think children are going to enjoy reading it to. I look forward to reading the next draft and I hope you find my suggestions clear and helpful. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me with any questions you may have regarding this letter. Thank you again, and good luck with the revision process.

Sincerely,

Kristen Ludwigsen