

ILLUSTRATION: AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE



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Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).

Introduction - A Letter to the Illustration Student from your Professor

A Letter to the Illustration Student from your Professor

Dear Students,

So you want to learn illustration. Congratulations! It's an exciting field that takes a certain kind of artist with a mind for visual storytelling to do well. You'll need to harness a lot of skills, work really hard, practice your observational skills, and your drawing/painting/printmaking (etc.!) skills. But most importantly, you've discovered that you're a person who wants to tell stories using art. That's such a gift.

Illustration vs Fine Art:

As you prepare to approach the lessons in this course, it may help to delineate the differences and similarities between illustration and what you have learned in your core skills courses in the Fine Arts—painting, drawing, and sculpture.

It might be easiest to think of illustration as the talkative child of fine art and design. Illustration works to communicate some sort of message in a way that Fine Art may not feel the need to. It often works in conjunction with a text, whether unpublished or published, or to advance a narrative. The artist must often consider his artwork as merely the starting point; it is then scanned or transformed into a web or printed object, used in conjunction with text or other elements of design on a page, and must therefore be designed in such a way. The “finished” illustration might be seen in printed form: for example, in a book, a magazine, or a comic or graphic novel. The same principles of design apply to illustration, such as contrast, value, line, composition, and color. Unlike works of fine art, which most often stand on their own, illustrations are also often repetitive in nature, employing repeated characters or places in a series of works meant to be viewed sequentially.



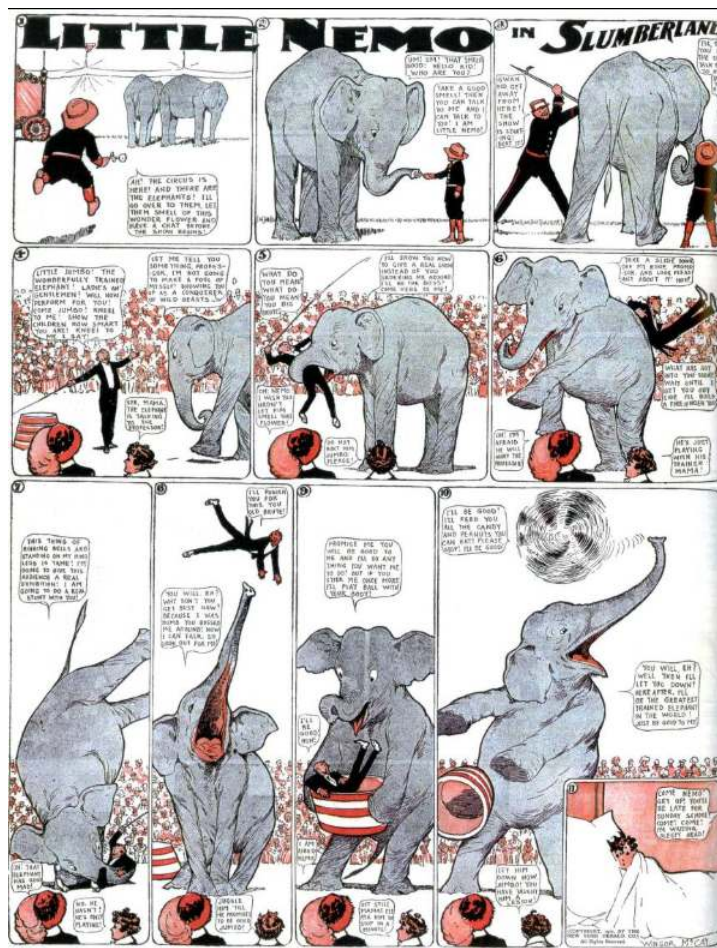
Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo in Slumberland" for the New York Herald 1905-1914

Mediums:

Like fine art, illustrations can be made in any medium—and this class will not limit the student in this manner, either. Each assignment is a problem meant to be solved: medium is only one part of the solution for any given work. More important as a consideration would be: which technique solves the problem the best? Which technique do you feel you have the most mastery in order to create the finished work? Is a mixed-media approach best? There are some typical combinations: children's books and comics for many years used ink and a variety of color options—watercolor or colored inks, for instance. But illustrators have explored using paints, printmaking, papercutting, collage, digital art, photography, and sculpture—or a mix of these—there is no right answer. So it's best not to limit yourself with your medium: ask how the problem wants to be solved. The secondary consideration would be to use your chosen medium in the most professional way possible and work to make yourself as good at using that medium as possible. It doesn't matter if *how you use your chosen medium* is different than how other people use it. Whatever medium you choose, work to master that. This will mean that you will need independent time to learn and practice whichever medium you choose to use for each assignment, because, in the end, it only matters how well your illustration communicates, and your technique is a big part of that.

An Art That Speaks: How Do Your Illustrations Communicate?

As I noted just above, in the end, it only matters how well your illustration communicates. An artwork can look gorgeous—but if it is not conveying what you need it to, it's not going to function well as an illustration. Is the emotion you want to show accurate and identifiable? What about an action—these can be hard to get right! Have you used a model to make sure the action or gesture is naturalistic (this is ok to do even if your style is not naturalistic). Composition should direct your eye around the picture—are you directing it to show what you want to see in the image in a particular order? Do text and image work together? Is there a logical sense of sequence? Are your characters identifiable in different images (do they look like the same person?) Does your use of space show relative size, scale, location, or even help to convey mood? Does your use of color (or black and white) add to the story that you want told? How does it communicate emotion or mood, time of day, or season?

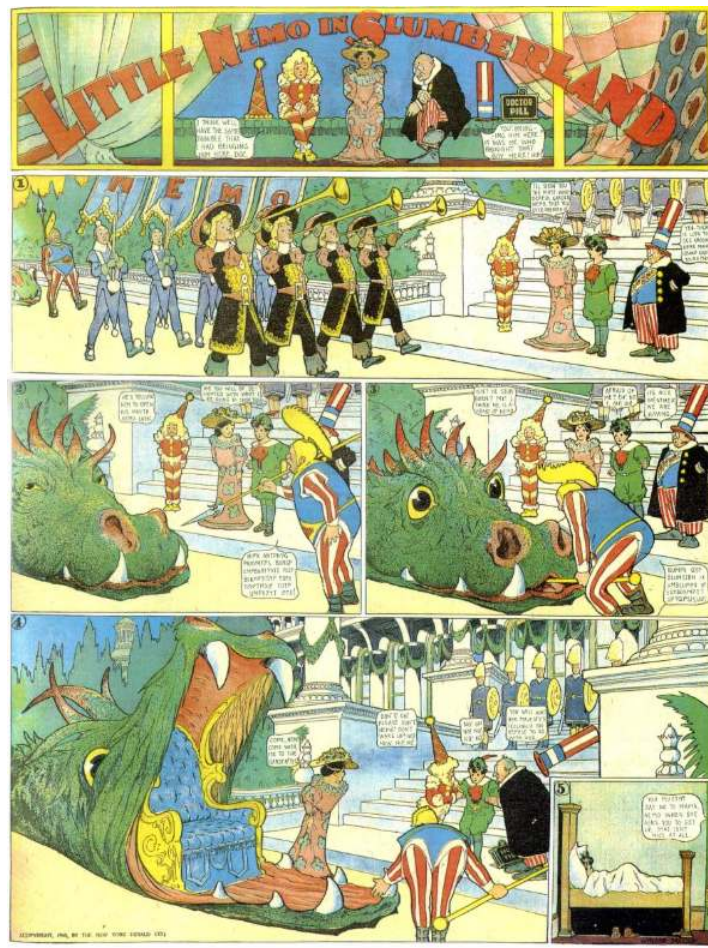


Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo in Slumberland" for The New York Herald, 1905-1914

These are all choices that you must make before you start your finished work. Thumbnail sketches—and lots of them—are the best way to quickly plan before you tackle the hard work of drawing. Indeed, once you've got your thumbnail down showing pose, composition, leading lines, and the broad strokes of your color palette, you've done the hard work already. You're much more likely to end with a successful illustration than if you start drawing without this time to make a deliberate plan. So slow down, take this time to think your work through—it will pay off.

Your Voice

Most importantly, you are in the process of finding your voice as an artist or as an illustrator. Many students are nervous about this, thinking they do not yet have a voice or style of their own—and perhaps they never will. It's ok to feel this way. The finding of your voice is a long process, and, I'd argue, it's ever-evolving. Many artists shift their styles many times in their lives, while others stick to one. There's no right answer. Focus instead on what feels good and natural to you, and take the time to observe how other artists do what they do well. You will never be able to draw just like another artist, just as they won't be able to draw like you. But you can learn skills and techniques from them and incorporate those lessons into your own natural drawing style.



Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo in Slumberland" 1905-1914 comic for The New York Herald.

Get used to looking deeply and carefully at the world. Notice the elements of art where you see them: beautiful color combinations, interesting examples of linear or atmospheric perspective, bold lines or forms, beautiful poses, or unique textures. Take photos of them if you don't have time to sketch it out. Read illustrated books for all ages and ask yourself why the artist made the choices they did and whether and why they work. This mode of looking will help you to develop how you make the art you do.

Allow your imagination to grow by reading and learning as much as you can. Imagination has a hard time flourishing where there is no food to sustain it. Be curious and believe in wonder. Watch for stories as they happen in your life, and cherish them. They are fodder for your work.

Let's get drawing!

Jessica Boehman

<http://www.jessicaboehman.com>

Professor, Illustrator, and Art Historian

Special Thanks

I wanted to give special thanks to those who helped this book come to life.

This book was made possible through an Open Educational Resource grant from CUNY (The City University of New York).

A great shoutout to my colleagues in the Fine Arts Program at LaGuardia Community College, where I've been able to teach both Art History and Illustration for the past many years.

Thanks to Rena Grossman and Ian McDermott from the LaGuardia library. It was their guidance that helped me through the process of making this book. Thank you to Dr. Preethi Radhakrishnan, who gave me the seed of idea for this project, and for allowing my students access to the college's urban farm for the botanical illustration project.

Thank you to my students who helped inspire me, who have taught me so much in their own ways. Special thanks to Johanna Guzman, Donivan Bonilla, Arnold Tatis-Algarin, Amelia Stepnowski, Ori Minghao Zhang, Isaac Ramos, and Benjamin Alexander Taveras González who helped to contribute to this book with their time and effort, their thoughts and words, and by allowing me to use their images to illustrate the book.

About the Author and the Co-Contributors

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About the author



Dr. Jessica Boehman. Photo by Maureen Drennan. Used with permission.

Dr. Jessica Boehman is an author-illustrator, art historian, and professor based in Brooklyn, NY. A member of a large military family, Dr. Boehman relocated to New York City in 2010. She holds both a PhD in Art History from the University of Pennsylvania (2009) and a B.A. in Studio Art and Art History from Western Maryland College (1999). Although she initially believed it would be impossible to merge her dual passions for art history and illustration into a professional career, she is now fortunate to teach the history, theory, and practice of art by day, while pursuing her own illustrative work by night.

Dr. Boehman is a full professor in the Fine Arts Program at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY) in New York City, where she also serves as the Interim Chair of the Humanities Department. As an art historian, she specializes in Renaissance and Baroque Italian sculpture, and teaches courses such as History of Illustration, History of Design, Italian Renaissance Art, as well as introductory art and art history survey classes.

In her practice as an illustrator, Dr. Boehman creates detailed works in both black and white and vibrant color. Her artwork blends elements of magic and whimsy with reality, often incorporating traditional painting techniques alongside digital drawing and collage. Dr. Boehman is the author and illustrator of two children's books: *The Lions at Night* (The RoadRunner Press, 2019) and *Café Au Lait: A Story of NF1 and My Special Spots* (The Children's Tumor Foundation, 2023). She's particularly inspired by true-to-life and "mostly true stories", and her recent work are graphic versions of such semi-autobiographical stories.

Dr. Boehman teaches both Illustration and Graphic Narrative at LaGuardia.

She resides in Brooklyn, NY. More information about her work can be found on her website, www.jessicaboehman.com, or on Instagram at @jessicaboehman.

about the co-contributors

I had the pleasure of working with some of my students on the creation of this textbook: this opportunity allowed me to get a student's point-of-view, as the audience of this book is students of illustration. I want to thank them each for their effort; teaching them and all of my students is one of the great pleasures (and challenges!) of my life.

Donivan Bonilla:

 Photo of Donivan Bonilla

Donivan Bonilla, Photo by Jessica Boehman. 2025.

Donivan Bonilla is an illustrator based in Brooklyn, with a passion for narrative storytelling. He is currently a student at LaGuardia Community College where he discovered a new love for comic illustration. A lot of his inspiration comes from horror media. You may follow him on Instagram @donivanfosho.

Johanna Guzman. Photo by Johanna Guzman, 2025. Used with permission.

Hello I'm Jojo – a name my friends gave me after *Mojo Jojo* from the Powerpuff Girls, and it's stuck with me ever since. I spent several years as a white-collar worker in the fashion world before deciding to return to school and finally pursue a long-time dream in the arts.

I'm majoring in Fine Arts—and I also like to say I minor in loopholes. My main interests are illustration, painting, and photography, though I also experiment with paper sculpture when inspiration strikes. Right now, I'm exploring – trying out different mediums and styles to discover what feels most fulfilling.

My style is still taking shape, but I'm especially drawn to ink work, water-based painting, and darkroom printing. You can check out some of my earlier pre-LaGuardia work on Instagram @theothergooseman. My art has expanded well beyond fan art, in part thanks to the tough but effective teachings and guidance of Dr. B in her illustration class.

Amelia Stepnowski, Photo by Jessica Boehman, 2025

My name's Amelia, and I have been the creative type since I could form memories. I think it runs in my blood, I look around my family tree as I see a ton of hard working and artistically skilled people, like my uncle who is an artist, to my sister, who was musically gifted, to even my mom who was pretty good when she really tried.

I like to call myself the Jack of all arts, because I'm a multimedia artist and even though I might not be the GOAT, I'm still pretty good at what I do and I have many more possibilities ahead of me being good at many things. One thing that really clicked for me was illustration. I was officially introduced to it in Dr. B's class at LaGuardia. I really felt connected to it because now I knew what to call my digital or even drawings on paper. It's something I've always had interest in without knowing it.

Arnold Tatis-Algarin:



Arnold Tatis-Algarin. Headshot by Nelson Ramirez. Used with permission. 2025.

Arnold Tatis-Algarin is a 2025 graduate in Fine Arts from LaGuardia Community College. Highly passionate in the world of graphic and independent arts, their work is marked with a boldened lens on the ennui of the observational world. Caroline Cash and Wong Kar Wai are key artistic and narrative inspirations. Having never touched digital art in their life (as of yet), they prefer to work in analog materials such as pen and ink in order to utilize negative space to its fullest and most graphic extent. You may find them on Instagram @80_ayyyy.



Benjamin Taveras González, 2025. Used with permission.

Benjamin Taveras Gonzalez (They, she , he), is a Dominican-born and raised artist. Working primarily in oil painting and digital illustration, Taveras Gonzalez's practice is rooted in empowerment, fantasy and cultural storytelling. Their work explores themes of Blackness, heritage, and visibility, serving as a vessel for ancestral voices and a celebration of Afro-Caribbean beauty and resilience.

Isaac Ramos. 2025. Used with permission.

My name is Isaac Ramos. I am originally from Mexico, more specifically, the state of Puebla and the region known as La Mixteca Poblana. After finishing high school in 2019, I had the opportunity to come to the USA with my family's support, and I have been living in Queens, NY, since then. I have an associate's degree in Fine Arts from LaGuardia Community College, and currently I am pursuing my bachelor's degree in Art Education at Queens College. The art I like to create is very much connected to my culture and life experiences growing up in my hometown, but also one to which people with the same background as me can relate. I take a lot of inspiration from contemporary Latin American artists, as well as the old masters, photographers, the media, and pop culture.



Ori Zhang. 2025.

Ori Zhang is a 2D digital illustrator and 3D environment artist with a focus on creating realistic, immersive game worlds. His recent work emphasizes environment design and optimization in Unreal Engine 5. He is currently majoring in Game Development at the Savannah College of Art and Design, pursuing a career in the entertainment industry.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Illustrating for a Client



Will you be Beauty or the Beast when you work for clients? Walter Crane, ‘At last, he turned towards her, and said, “Am I so very ugly?”’ for “Beauty and the Beast.” Engraved by Edmund Evans, 1896.

In this section, we will consider one of the primary ways that illustration differs from Fine Art: working directly with a client for a commission or published project. In my experience, young illustrators often have difficulty the first time they are attempting to work within client specifications or trying to fit their needs; there’s a natural feeling of pushback or a sense of autonomy that rears its head. This is normal! A good way to think about this process is to remember that you are making something for the client that they cannot, that they want something that represents them, their project, or their needs, and that it’s important enough for them to pay someone else to help them achieve it. Moreover, they like your work and your style enough to pay you for it. Consider it an honor to be chosen to fill this need and work hard to treat this as seriously as you would your own independent work.

Below we will discuss some things to keep in mind when working on any illustration project, and we’ll consider basics like project specifications and having a contract with which you can protect your work. There’s a sample project for a client–Botanical Illustration for an Urban Farm–that can be adapted for a similar project in any illustration course.

[1.1: The Specifications- Getting Started with Any Illustration](#)

[1.2: Professionalism](#)

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1.1: The Specifications- Getting Started with Any Illustration

Before you get started with any illustration, you need to take a moment to consider the specifications. How you set up your page will depend on if you are working traditionally or digitally.

Traditional-style Illustrations

Traditional illustrations (those made on paper or another physical support, like a canvas) are still just as common as working digitally, so you should feel comfortable working in whatever way you prefer. But you must take into consideration some basics to set the page up correctly.

Working traditionally has many benefits. The paper and medium you choose create textures that cannot be accurately replicated by digital artwork. It creates something absolutely unique that could never be exactly replicated by another. Many illustrators love the tactile nature of it, as well as the sound of their medium against the paper.

However, you must be much more careful to sketch thumbnails, to transfer sketches to clean paper, and to keep your support clean and free of smudges, crinkles, indentations from hard-leaded pencils, or tears. It is much more difficult to make changes, and depending on the medium, you may not be able to correct mistakes (think about using ink). However, some artists like the challenge of these limitations and think it is worth it for the gorgeous beauty of a finished, traditional work of art. Mastering traditional mediums sets you up for technical success in any medium in which you work, as it develops the habits of working carefully and caring for your work of art.

Dimensions (traditional):

There are a few ways of approaching how to think about your finished work. Unlike digital artwork, where you can zoom in very far, depending on resolution, you cannot zoom in on a paper. This means you must work largely enough to achieve the detail you desire.

Some traditional illustrators prefer to work larger than the finished project specifications, knowing that the work they create is not the final project: it still needs to be scanned or photographed. The trick to this: working 1.5x or 2x the size of your finished work allows you to get the detail you want; moreover, when the work is printed at the proper size, the illustration looks tighter and crisper. This is especially true if you are working on illustrations that are meant to be printed small, like for a spot illustration in a book.

If you choose to size up, you must make all illustrations for any given project at the same scale, or they will not read the same once they are printed at the finished size. You want your line quality to remain the same over the course of a project.

A consideration to keep in mind when “sizing up:” you can only work as big as the paper you have access to. So pick the biggest illustration in the project you are working on. For instance, if you are working to illustrate a book, a spread (two-page illustration) will be the largest. If you multiply each of the dimensions of that page by 1.5 or 2, do you have a paper that is big enough to support that? You do not want to get into a situation where you are trying to digitally stitch together two illustrations drawn on two different pages. Head to the art store and see how large they sell individual sheets of the type of paper you would like to use: that may help inform your decision.

How to Calculate for Sizing Up:

If the finished illustration, with added “trim” (see below), is 8×10”, then sizing up 1.5x would make this illustration 12”×15”. If it is doubled in size, the finished illustration would be 16×20”. Do not forget to leave .5” on all sides for a trim, and an inch in the middle if working with a double page spread.

Starting a Digital Document:

In the same manner, if you are working digitally, you can choose your specifications when you open a new document. (Note: you cannot change to a higher resolution after starting an image, so be sure to pay attention at this first step.)

Dimensions (Digital):

You can choose to size an image based on print dimensions (inches) or digital dimensions (pixels). Remember to calculate the size of your image including the trim; however, most programs will allow you to change the size of your canvas after starting if you forget this step.

Resolution (DPI):

Resolution is the number of pixels that can be displayed in a square inch. DPI is another term for resolution and stands for dots per inch. Traditionally, if you want to print to the exact specifications of dimension that you've chosen, 300DPI is the standard resolution needed for printing, as most printers are limited to 300 dots per inch when printed. Web quality images are standardly saved as 72DPI as the computer has less capability for display than does a print medium. However, some artists will double or triple their resolution if working digitally (or scanning traditional works). Working to a higher resolution will allow you to work with more detail and be more precise in tiny areas as there will be less pixelation (blurring of the image due to loss of quality). It will also allow you to print your work larger. So, for instance, if you had an 8×10" artwork on paper that you wanted to reproduce at 16×20 (2x the size), you could scan it at 600 DPI (300×2) in order to double its final size. Remember that the higher your resolution, the larger your file will be, which could slow down your computer or tablet.

It's good practice to save one artwork under two names for print and web purposes, as they will have different resolutions. For instance, I save my scanned or digital artworks in this manner: "NAME-TITLE-300DPI" or "NAME-TITLE-72DPI" to differentiate. If you accidentally overwrite your high resolution image with a smaller dpi, you will lose your high resolution image, so take care at this step.

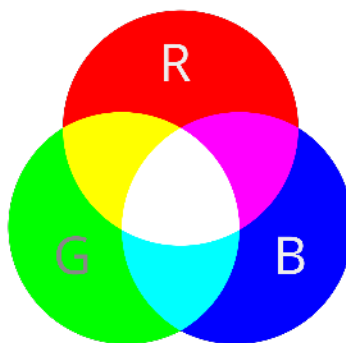
Lastly: always start big! You can size down a print quality, 300dpi image to 72DPI to make it a web quality image, but you cannot change a web quality 72DPI image to print quality. You cannot add information to a file if it has started small. All you will get is a 300DPI image with lots of pixelation.

Color Profile:

When working digitally, you must also consider the color profile at this point. In order to pick correctly, you will need to know HOW your finished illustration will be used in its final form (for print or for web use) so that its color may be reproduced accurately.

Unlike a traditional artist's color wheel, which shows how color in the form of paint function when mixed, the two main color profiles we'll consider here work slightly differently than does paint. The two main profiles to understand are RGB and CMYK.

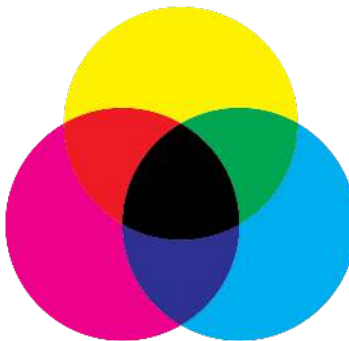
RGB:



An RGB color profile

RGB (Red, Green, Blue) is based on the primary colors of light. RGB is the standard choice for web images, as it relates to how computers process color. When mixed together, the primaries create white. This is the opposite of pigment or ink, which, when mixed, become duller and darker.

CMYK:



A CMYK color wheel

CMYK stands for Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Key (Black) is a printing color profile used by many but not all professional printers. These are the primary colors of printing, and it's a subtractive process. You may better recognize the red from your traditional artist's color wheel—which you have come to know as a primary color—as the combination of magenta and yellow (it's become a secondary color!), and a true green as the combination of yellow and cyan, which is more of a sky blue than the traditional primary blue. Black, known as the *key*, is the combination of all three of these printing primary colors.

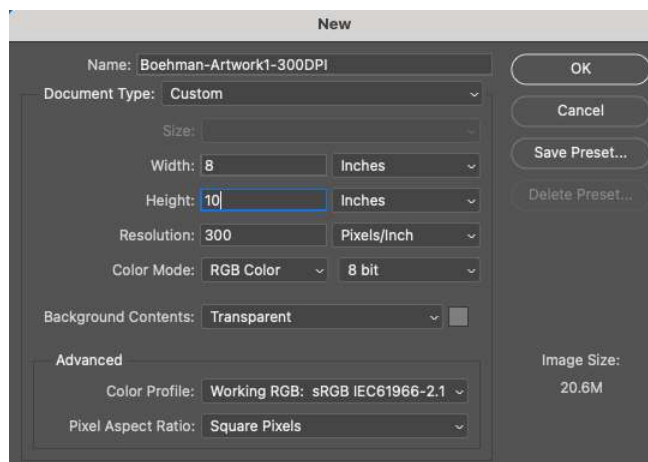
If working digitally with an end goal of printing, you may notice that your color palette is more subdued when working in a CMYK color profile as opposed to an RGB color profile. Reds in particular are more of a soft, reddish orange. It takes some getting used to.

(Note: it's best to ask which color profile will be needed for your project, as some specialty printers, which use 12 or more inks, like giclée printers, find that RGB more accurately reproduces color for them. In cases such as these, using a CMYK color profile will actually produce colors which do not match your artwork, skewing pinks more magenta, yellows more neon, and greys more blue. So do your due diligence and find this out at the start to avoid extra steps later—to frustration [or lost money] when your work prints incorrectly and needs to be redone).

It is possible to convert images from CMYK to RGB and vice versa, which is useful if you need to have images for print and web. A CMYK image will not display properly on the web; colors will skew. So if you're using that same image for the web, be sure to convert it to an RGB color profile before uploading to your website, or the colors will look skewed.

Background color:

When working digitally, some programs have a standard of starting with a transparent background, like Procreate. In Adobe Photoshop, you must choose the background color at this initial stage in the New File Window under "Background Contents". If you need an image with a transparent background, start with a transparent background at this step. This is useful for printing things like t-shirts, stickers, or for making web images that will sit against a variety of color backgrounds. (In this case, be sure to save your file as a .PNG, which will preserve the transparent background. JPG will make your transparent background white, which would show up in print or web uses as a white square the same dimensions as your file.)



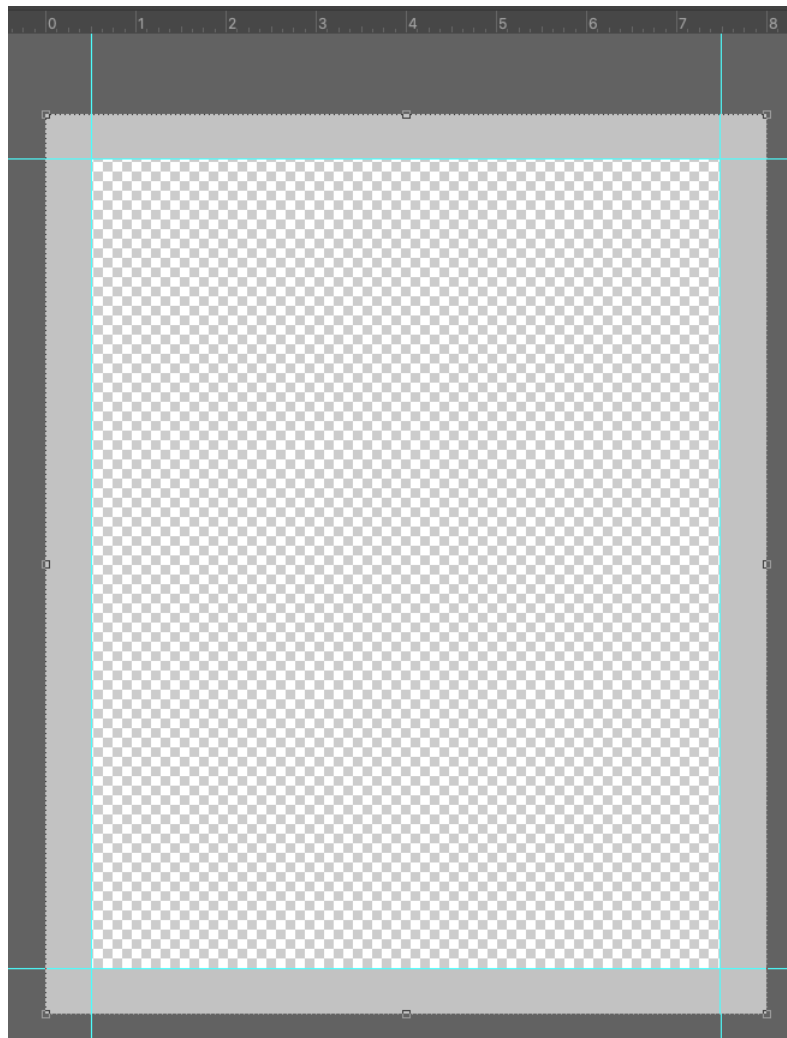
A new file box on Photoshop showing the specifications over which the user has control.

Here you see a screenshot from a “New File” on Adobe Photoshop. You can see I picked my dimensions, resolution, color mode, and background contents.

Trims

Most illustration projects will need you to consider using a trim or bleed area. Whether working traditionally or digitally, this increases the final size of your illustration and must be taken into account. Always check, if working with a publisher or client, if there is a particular size trim needed to meet the specifications of the printer. A general rule of thumb adds 1/2" (.5") to all four sides of an illustration. For instance, a drawing that is meant to be 8×10 would be increased to 9×11" in total, taking into account for the trim. Trim sizes can vary within a project; cover designs often need an extra 3/4" of trim (1.25" total) to allow for the cover to be folded over the boards of the book. So *always* ask before proceeding a large project.

The purpose of the trim is to allow an illustration to be *full bleed*, which means that the color extends, or “bleeds,” all the way to the edge of the page. In order for this to work in a printing process, the illustration must continue past a trim line where the page will be cut by the printer. Below you see an illustration that I’ve laid out with a trim using rulers on Photoshop, but you can do this on any digital program. (If the program does not have built in rulers, be sure to add the trim lines on a separate layer that you can hide).



Notice the trim at the edge, marked in grey.

The blue lines are rulers that will not show in the saved image. They will show up under “View–Extras” and then can be pulled down from the ruler at the top and left of the window and released to mark any point on your document. The rulers must be turned on in the “View” dropdown menu.

In order to have a full bleed, the image must extend into the zone I’ve colored grey so you can see it easily. Imagine your image will be cut along these blue lines. You do not want anything of import in this grey area, as it will get lost in the final document. What you are trying to achieve is a perfect printed edge of color.

For example: here is an old drawing of mine where I did not plan for a trim. If I wanted this to print perfectly for a client printing this as a full bleed image in a book or magazine, I would have extended the image on all sides. See where the rulers overlap the image, marked at 1/2” marks:



"Bedtime Stories" by Jessica Boehman with trim lines.

If this were to be trimmed along the trim lines:



"Bedtime Stories" by Jessica Boehman trimmed improperly.

As you see, I would lose enough information that the composition does not work, so don't make your image first and then hope that it will work with a trim. Plan the image WITH THE TRIM from the start.

If working traditionally, you will have to make tiny marks on the edge of your page that can be easily hid. I like to use a little cross, like this.

 Showing how to add a trim on a traditional artwork, marked by an X

How to add a trim on a traditional artwork, marked by an X

If you are working with spot illustrations, or other illustrations that are not full bleed, then your image must fully fit *within* the trim lines for it to print as you imagine it.

Trims for double page illustrations:

For spreads, or double page illustrations for magazines or books, you need to imagine that it's two pages with their trims stacked side by side. That means there will be a one inch gutter in the middle of the spread. This is where the pages will be bound and there will be information loss in these areas. So you need to plan it out when you plan the trim so that you have the proper dimension and know where to avoid putting important information, text, faces, or action.

Here is an example from my 2019 book *The Lions at Night* (RoadRunner Press, 2019).

 Double page spread from Jessica Boehman, *The Lions at Night*, with trim

Double page spread from Jessica Boehman, “*The Lions at Night*”, with trim. 2018. Colored pencil, pencil, and digital.

You can see that no important information has been lost in the gutter or in the area of trim. Now picture this cropped along the outer trim line. The color extends all the way to the edge. So, this is an example of a full bleed image.

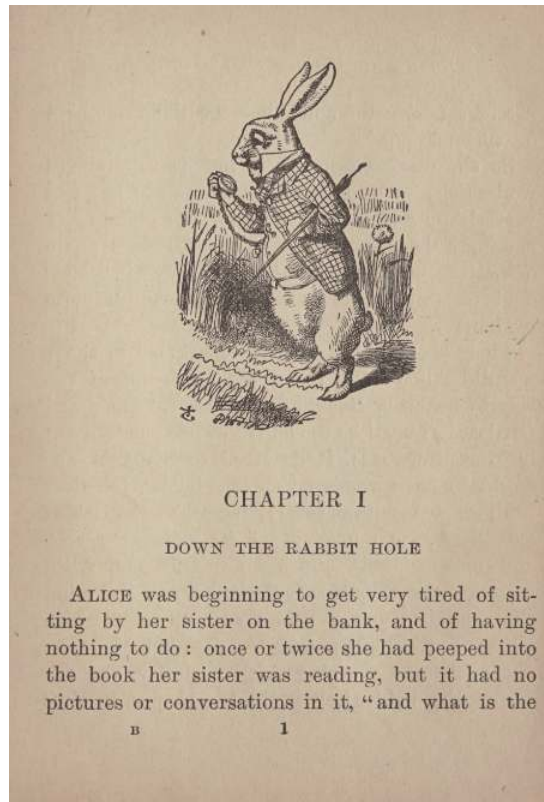
To Sum Up!

- Save time and frustration by keeping **all** of these lessons in mind when starting to lay out your image so that you do not get stuck having to rework an image to the proper project specifications.
- Illustrators need to be precise and detail-oriented, so it's best to start these habits now.

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1.2: Professionalism

How to Get Hired More Than Once as an Illustrator



(Don't Be Late for a Very Important Date!) "The White Rabbit" from "Alice in Wonderland," illustrated by Sir John Tenniel, printed by the Dalziel Brothers. Wood engraving.

Professionalism:

One of the lessons you will see repeated throughout the lessons in this course is professionalism. There are many facets of this and you should start practicing all of them now. Make them second nature, a habit. We'll discuss this more with each assignment you find here—but things you should start practicing now:

1. Following the client pitch exactly from the start. If you aren't doing this, you aren't giving the client what they need and the finished illustration will not suit their needs.
2. Follow the requested formatting specifications to the number. This includes dimensions, requested room for bleeds, and file specifications (dpi, color profile, and file types) for the finished work.
3. Get in the habit of keeping your work clean. Get all of your sketchy dirty work done on one piece of paper and then transfer lightly to a clean, good-quality piece of paper when you are ready to draw. This will prevent eraser marks, pencil indentations from erasers. You can use a lightboard to help you transfer a drawing if working on paper. If working digitally, start a new layer over your sketch to keep the drawing pristine. Clean up any smudges immediately if using a friable (has a tendency to smear) medium like pencil, charcoal, pastels, or colored pencils. Use a fixative to protect your final drawing if using these friable media (do not use it on ink or watercolors). Imagine turning a dirty work in to a client or editor! I bet you can't as you would never do that. Start building good habits now.
4. Get your work done on time: it's called a *deadline* for a reason. Get sketches done in time to get client feedback and do not proceed without client approval. Be prepared to take any last minute changes and apply them for your final work.
5. Remember, the client has hired you because they like your style. But also, you must show your own professionalism. If you are difficult to work with, or do not follow the above advice, you may get paid for your very first job, but you won't be rehired. So be professional, be easy to work with, and check your ego at the door. Focus on the work and making something that shows off your best work while making the client happy.

6. **Not working with a client, but an editor or art director? A good editor or art director is there to push you to do your best. They have great insight. Don't be too proud to know when someone is working to make your work even better. They want you to succeed, too.

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1.3: Materials and Media

Each illustration, assignment, or commission will have different needs in terms of the materials and medium you choose. You may find, however, that there are those that work best with how you think creatively, with your chosen processes, or with your level of patience with art. In this section, we will explore some of the common mediums that artists use; however, this is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list.

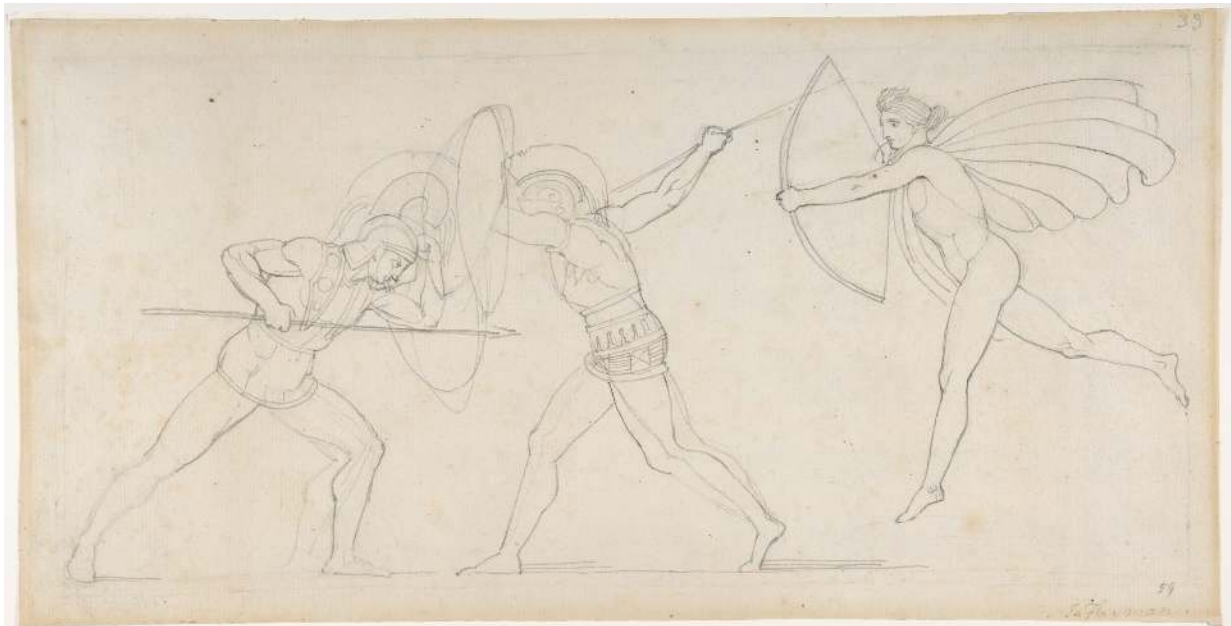
Learning Objectives

In this section, we will explore working processes of various media with examples of different effects that each medium can create.

Pencil

Pencil is the most basic, and most fundamental, of media. It's the one that you carry with you, the one you use to sketch, plan, and play. But it can also be used for finished illustrations, as well. The medium has been around for hundreds of years, and will stick around forever.

Pencils are the go-to medium for planning. Cheap, portable, and erasable, pencils give artists the flexibility that many other mediums do not. Below, we can see John Flaxman's pencil lines, *pentimenti*, beneath the finished line drawings. Given the clarity of his lines, these *pentimenti* allow him to sketch, finding the proper poses before adding the more permanent medium of ink.



John Flaxman, Illustration for "Seven Chiefs Against Thebes" (recto); Studies of Figures (verso). Pen and black and gray ink, graphite. Gift of Estate of Mrs. Edward Robinson, 1952 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In this 19th-century drawing by Adrian Ludwig Richter, you can see that artists have used pencil in the same way for the last many hundreds of years. He's sketching, playing with composition, value, and pose. He renders in hatching.



Adrian Ludwig Richter, "Two Designs for Illustration," graphite. 19th century. Gift of J. B. Newmann, 1930, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Types of Pencils

Artist's pencils come in a range of hardnesses from Bs (soft leads) to H (hard leads). Each type of lead is given a number—the higher the number, the harder or softer the lead is (for instance, a 6B is significantly softer and darker than a B, and a 6H is significantly harder and greyer than an H.) You will find a use for some or all of the pencils, depending on your style. The Bs are good to achieve rich blacks, but are much softer and therefore much more friable. They will leave more of the texture of the paper behind. The Hs are harder and therefore must be used with care. A light touch will result in a lovely, even, soft grey that blends away the texture of the paper, and can be layered over B pencils to negate the paper's texture, as well. But press too hard with H pencils and you will dent or even tear the paper. Below, I've added two or three layers of each pencil in a square with the same amount of pressure to give a sense of the differences in value and fineness that can be achieved with different pencils.

 The range of values produced by H and B pencils

A range of values produced by various H and B pencils.

Rendering

Most common forms of rendering follow one of these three styles: hatching, cross-hatching, and rendering with a continuous line without lifting the hand. As you can see, they have different effects.

 Rendering in hatching, cross-hatching, and continuous line

Rendering in hatching, cross-hatching, and continuous line.

Pencils can give a variety of effects depending on style. Some famous books have been illustrated with pencil, such as Chris van Allsburg's *Jumanji*. Here are two pictures by this author to show various effects pencils can achieve. This drawing below, "Life Drawing," showcases both the linear quality of pencil in the bear's fur, but also the subtle rendering and range of value that can be achieved with pencil.



Jessica Boehman, "Life Drawing" pencil and gouache. 2016. Used with permission. Do not reproduce.

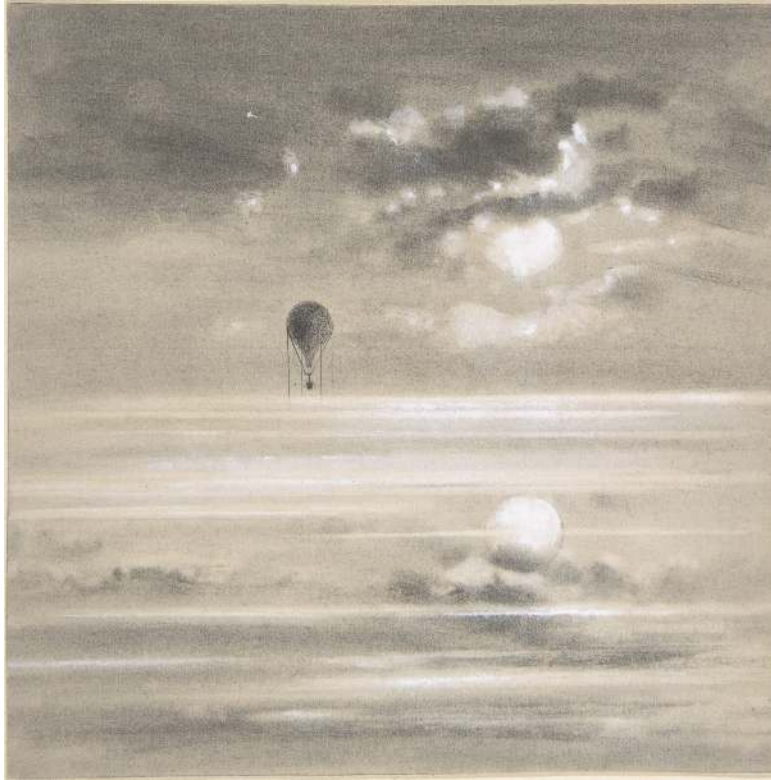
Below, you can see how pencil can be used to achieve a variety of textures and values. It's important, especially in pencil drawings, to remember the value scale, as rendering with pencil with grey tones can easily lead to mud if you do not remember to leave room for both black and white.



Jessica Boehman "Daphne (with border)" 2014-2022. Pencil. Used with permission. Do not reproduce.

Pencils can also be used, in some cases, with brush or water (if using the graphite in powdered form) to give a softness that is hard to achieve even with careful rendering. Artist beware, this graphite powder is toxic and must be used sparingly and with a mask in a

well-ventilated area, as it is a known carcinogen.



Albert-Charles Tissandier, Drawing for an Illustration in “Voyages du Flandre” The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Graphite with brush and some heightening. The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1960 for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Suggested surfaces for pencil

Pencils work great on any number of supports.

- Sketch paper
- Bristol Board
- Hot Press watercolor paper
- Board or panel

Colored Pencil

Though the industrial processes that allowed us to make colored pencils—a brightly colored, waxy core encapsulated in a wooden casing—is relatively modern, artists have been drawing in color in various ways for thousands of years, using chalks based on natural pigments. However, the pencil we’ve come to know and love since the early twentieth century makes the artist’s job easier and more efficient.



Various hues of colored pencils. Photo by Jessica Boehman.

Colored pencils can be used in many ways, on many surfaces, but I have found that they like a thick, smooth paper that will allow them to be used in any way you wish: lightly, allowing the texture of the paper to show through, layered thickly to showcase the pencils' ability to deliver rich, vibrant color, or used in mixed media with pencil, watercolor, charcoal, or other media.

Tips for Working in Colored Pencils

Colored pencils come in a wide variety of colors which can be used “straight”—like you would use paint directly from the tube.

However, in **layering** colored pencils in the same way one would layer pencils to achieve a richer rendering, you have the opportunity to mix colors to achieve custom results. Your knowledge of mixing colors in paint will come in handy here—experiment to get the effects you desire. Remember to add your light colors first and then layer with darker tones, as dark tones will show over the top of light colors, but lighter colors have less ability to show vibrantly atop dark colors. Remember that any combo you use of colors will be affected by the base color. (For instance, adding a grey ovetop of yellow will change the nature of the grey). The best thing to do is to keep a spare sheet of paper to test color mixtures before experimenting on your final drawing. You will become more confident in which colors work best together with practice and experience.

Jan Toorop, "Joan of Arc". 1898. Graphite and colored pencils. Gift of Dorothy Braude Edinburg to the Harry B. and Bessie K. Braude Memorial Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Take a look at the drawing above by Jan Toorop. Here, he uses the colored pencils in various ways. First, he uses it relatively lightly (see the blue), allowing the paper's texture to remain. He layers pencil over top (see the skirt), but also allows it to remain as the slightly messy line that the colored pencils naturally produce (see the red arabesques in the border).

Using a base layer: To save time, you may consider adding base layers of solid color or tone. Water soluble graphite works well to consistently deepen the tone of a drawing. Add the graphite in the places you want to be naturally greyer or darker, and then use a brush and clean water to blend. Wait until completely dry before adding your pencils, or the paper will rip. In this self portrait below, the artist Ivan Albright used graphite and charcoal as a base layer before highlighting with colored pencils.

 Self portrait of Ivan Albright using graphite, charcoal, and colored pencil

Ivan Albright, “Self Portrait (No. 14)”, 1982. Charcoal, white chalk, and colored pencil on hardboard.

In this old drawing by the author of this book, I experimented with starting with graphite rendering first in the areas of deeper shadow, then adding colored pencil, and finishing with more graphite for small details and shading. You can see the vibrancy I was able to achieve, and the colors I mixed in the various flowers. I used Berol Prismacolor brand colored pencils on Arches brand 140lb hot press watercolor paper. I used a 3H pencil for soft shading overtop of the colored pencils, and a mechanical pencil for small details and fine lines.



Jessica Boehman, “Alice in July”, 2014. Pencil and colored pencil.

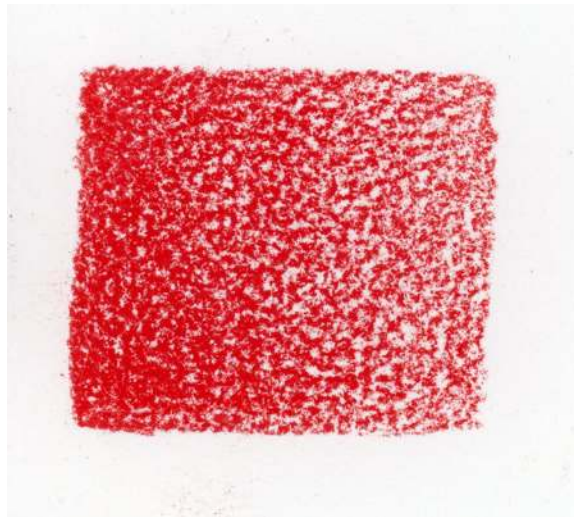
You can also draw easily over watercolor with colored pencils; this is a classic combination. This drawing below mixes a watercolor base layer with graphite and colored pencil.

Ralph Thomas Walker, Century of Progress Exposition Tower of Water and Light, Chicago, Illinois, 1930. Graphite, watercolor, and colored pencil. Gift to the Art Institute of Chicago by Haines Lundberg Waehler in honor of the museum's centennial

Suggested surfaces for Colored Pencils

- **Bristol Board (100lbs)** colored pencils like the smoothness of its vellum-like surface: you will be able to achieve a subtle render, but you will have limited ability to layer before the paper reaches its limit and will no longer accept more layers of pencil.
- **Drawing paper (no lighter than 80lbs):** It's fun to draw right into your sketchbook, but know that this will work best if you tend to draw lightly with the pencils and do not want to layer the pencils. If you attempt to achieve an effect that covers the paper's natural tooth by layering or pressing hard with the pencils, the paper will buckle, making your finished illustration nearly impossible to photograph without light catching on the ripples of the paper.
- **Cold press watercolor paper (140lbs):** The rough tooth of the watercolor is appealing to those who like to show the texture of the paper. This would work best with a light treatment of pencil. If attempting a drawing that will not show the natural texture of the paper, this would not be an ideal choice.
- **Hot press watercolor paper (140lbs)** (This author's preferred choice). The heavy weight of the watercolor papers lend themselves well to colored pencil, as they will not buckle, but the smooth surface of the hot press is ideal for those looking to heavily layer colored pencil. The paper will accept many layers, as well as various pencils, inks, or even watercolor, which you may want to use to create a mixed-media illustration.

Here's how the colored pencils react depending on the surface (I'll demonstrate here with just cold press and hot press watercolor papers).



Single color on cold press watercolor paper.

Above, we see how a single color, Scarlet Lake, looks like on the heavy tooth of Cold Press watercolor paper. Lots of texture shows through.

Adding a gradient of four colors (Scarlet Lake, Carmine Red, Pale Vermillion, and Yellowed Orange) on the same surface produces a slightly different effect. Some like the texture this surface produces.

 Gradient of four colors on cold press watercolor paper.

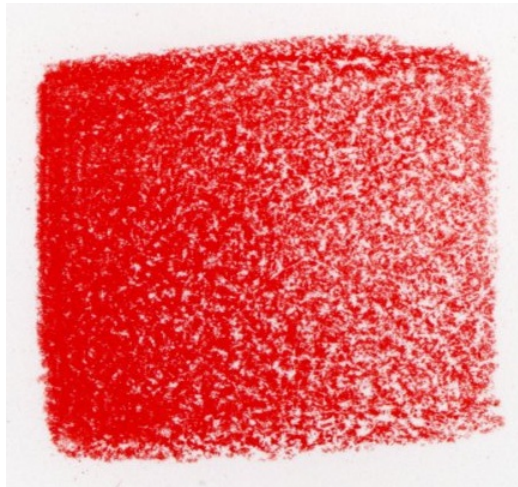
A gradient of four colors on cold press watercolor paper.

You'll notice that adding another layer using a colorless blender brightens the colors and removes some of the texture, but cold press paper is too textured for it to be fully removed. This effect is a personal choice.

 Cold press gradient of four colors using a colorless blender

Cold press gradient of four colors using a colorless blender.

Using hot press watercolor paper produces slightly different effects.

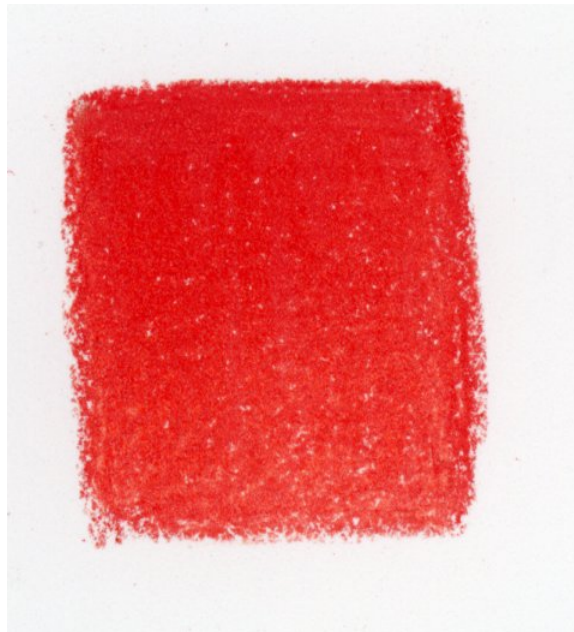


Single color on hot press watercolor paper using a colorless blender.

 Four color gradient on hot press watercolor paper.

Four color gradient on hot press watercolor paper using a colorless blender.

You see that the texture is slightly reduced. Adding a colorless blender works better on hot press, as it removes more texture and creates more vibrancy in color:



Single color on hot press watercolor paper with the addition of a colorless blender.



A four color gradient on hot press paper with a horsehair brush

You may find as you layer colored pencils (and use the sort of pressure you would need to remove the paper's tooth) that your pencils generate a waxy dust, which is potentially damaging to your final drawing. Be sure to keep a clean paper under your drawing hand at all times and have a clean eraser and a horsehair brush on hand. The brush can be used to sweep away any dust without adding any oils from your hand. Use the eraser to pick up any small smudges left behind. In this way, you will keep your paper as clean as possible.

Using a finishing layer on top:

You may want to use another medium on top of colored pencil for crispness. Pencils of various softnesses—from the Bs to the Hs—all work well, depending on the darkness and quality of the line you want to achieve. I find that the Hs work well to add subtle, grey shading, while a 2 or 3B works well for a darker outline. Experiment with what works for you. *I would not recommend adding ink on top of colored pencil*—especially if you are using a nib, as the waxy crayon will clog the tip and the ink will not stick. If you must use ink, apply it with a small, detail brush.

When you are done:

Like any friable medium, be sure to use a fixative spray when you have completed your illustration.

Ink

Suggested surfaces for ink

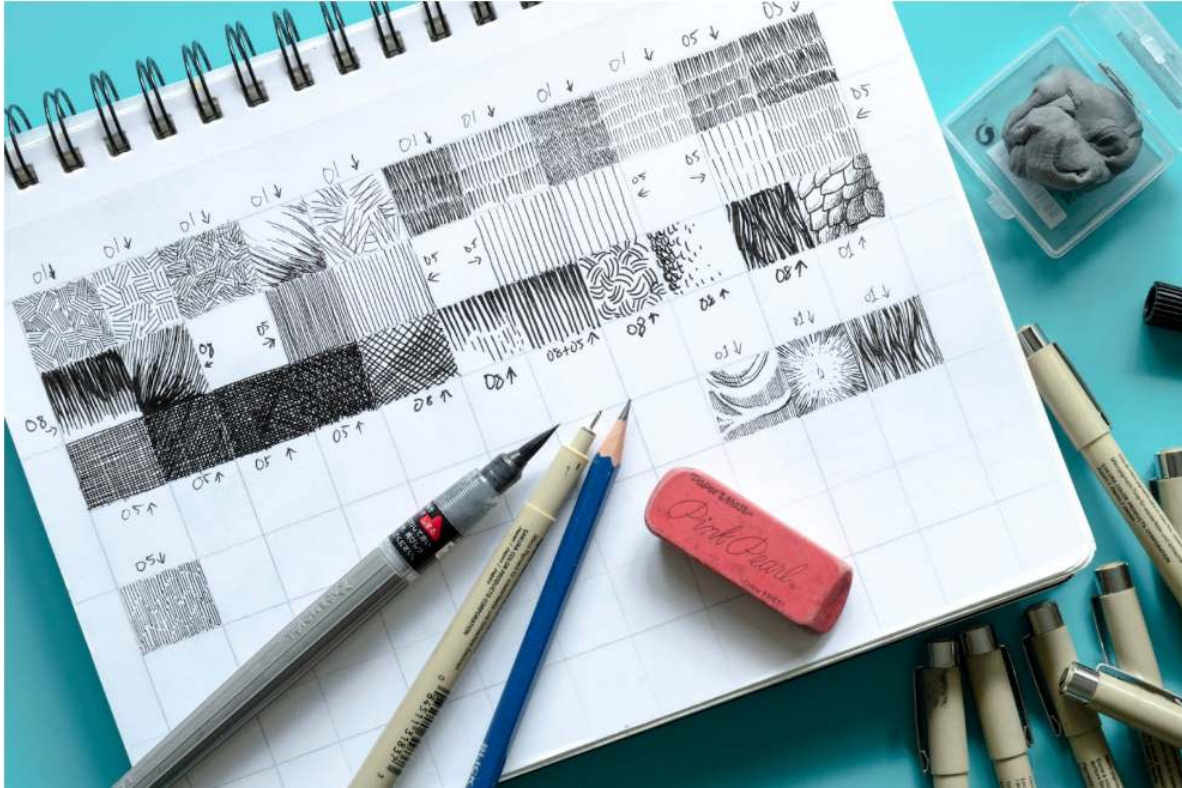
Ink likes a smooth surface. Try to avoid anything with too much tooth as it will disrupt your line.

- Paper for Ink: Various companies make paper specifically for ink. It's very smooth, with almost no tooth, and will not disrupt the line.
- Bristol board: the smoothness of bristol works great, too

- Hot press watercolor paper: the thickness of the paper will absorb more ink than the other papers above, but it works beautifully
- Cold press watercolor paper: use only for ink wash as it will accept the water more easily.

Ink can be used in many ways: with a dip pen with various nibs, a pre-inked pen with a fixed tip, a pre-inked pen with a brush or variable tip, with a brush dipped in pure ink, or as a wash. Nib pens give a flexible line. Brushes are the most expressive. Fixed-size tips, like Micron pens, are good for consistent lines or tiny details. You have to experiment to see what works best for you, but likely it is a combination of the above. You should also consider what types of ink you prefer: India ink? Colored inks? Waterproof or water-soluble? Acrylic ink? Fountain pen inks? Each has different purposes, feels, and uses.

Student JoJo Guzman came up with a cheat sheet of marks for rendering in ink. You might do the same.



Johanna Guzman, A swatch page of ink textures in a sketchbook. 2024. Used with permission.

A careful application of ink can produce lovely, variegated line, value, texture, and tone. See in this drawing below the various effects achieved with an ink pen.



Jacques de Gheyn II (Netherlandish, Antwerp 1565–1629 The Hague), “Study of Eleven Heads”. Pen and three shades of brown ink with black chalk on laid paper. Late 16th–early 17th century. Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, Frits and Rita Markus Fund, and Charles and Jessie Price Gift, 2006. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Ink wash allows for a quick addition of value or tone. Mix straight ink with water, like you would with watercolor, on a small palette, and apply with a brush. You can see this added over sepia ink lines.



Nicola Maria Rossi (Italian, Naples (?) 1690–1758 Naples), “Two Kneeling and Two Standing Figures”. Pen, brown ink, gray wash, over black chalk. Gift of Henry Walters, 1917. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Ink works well with other media. If using other wet media, be sure to use a waterproof ink to lay down your lines or tones. It pairs naturally with watercolor:



Adriaen van Ostade (Dutch, Haarlem 1610–1685 Haarlem), “Reading the News at the Weavers’ Cottage.” Pen and brown ink, watercolor, white heightening, over traces of graphite; framing lines by the artist (?) in pen and brown ink and gold. Bequest of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann, 1996. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Here William Blake used ink various ways—with pen and brush, with wash, and added graphite and watercolor, as well. It reveals that ink does not have to be such an extreme, bold choice. The colors below are soft.



William Blake, "Angel of the Revelation (Book of Revelation, chapter 10)". 1803. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1914

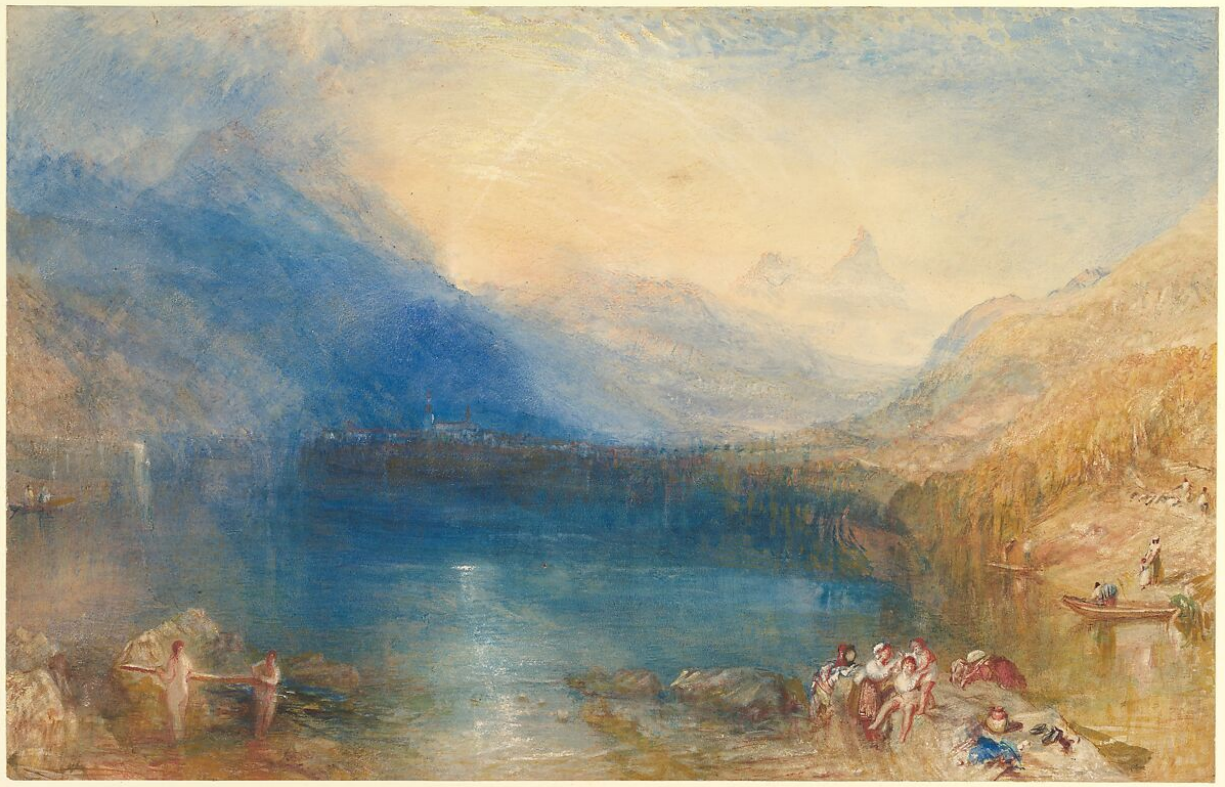
Watercolor

In this image, Indian artist Bhawani Das uses watercolor, richly and thickly applied with minimal water, to achieve deep, rich color, and layers ink and graphite on top on in order to get the crisp detail he requires.



Bhawani Das, Great Indian Fruit Bat, ca. 1777–82. Pencil, ink, and opaque watercolor on paper;) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Anonymous Gift, Cynthia Hazen Polsky Gift, Virginia G. LeCount Bequest, in memory of The LeCount Family, 2007 Benefit Fund, Louis V. Bell, Harris Brisbane Dick, Fletcher, and Rogers Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and Gift of Dr. Mortimer D. Sackler, Theresa Sackler and Family, 2008 (2008.312)

Here we see Turner layer watercolor over graphite in the same way I layered colored pencil over graphite above. He uses the paint as thin washes in areas of light (the sky, the far mountains shown in aerial perspective) aerial perspective, and with minimal water to achieve the vibrancy of the blue of an alpine, glacier-fed lake.



Joseph Mallord William Turner (British, London 1775–1851 London), *The Lake of Zug*, 1843. British, Watercolor over graphite; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Marquand Fund, 1959 (59.120)

Depending on the amount of water used, you can achieve soft washes or rich, vibrant color. You may experiment with watercolor from bricks or from the tube to see what you prefer. But the effect is up to you. Just be sure not to overload the paper with water, or to overwork the paper, which will result in pilling. Work quickly, work lightly, and allow the paper to dry between layers if you want to minimize the mixing of color.

Here is an old nature study by the author of this book. Here, I used watercolor very saturated for the body of the cicada killer, and a light wash for the wings and shadows to show the transparency.



Jessica Boehman, "Eastern Cicada Killer." Watercolor. 2018. Used with permission.

Digital Art

Digital art has quickly become an industry standard, but is difficult to illustrate here as you can achieve nearly every effect with it. Like any medium, it requires practice. There are various, inexpensive programs out there, but I would suggest paying for a program without ads. These free programs are readily available but are much more limited in their capabilities. I would recommend Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Procreate, or Clip Studio Pro. You may have free access through your school to the Adobe suite, if not, it is a subscription service. Procreate is a one time small fee but well worth it.

Don't rely on fancy brushes that will give your work away as digital. Try to experiment with how you would normally draw and use the digital tools to allow for ease of editing, layering, and playing with color.

Building your Collection of Supplies on a Budget

Don't feel like you need to purchase everything at once. Be judicious; most art supplies will last a long time, so you can add to your collection when you can afford it. Buy a good quality brush but take good care of it and it will last nearly forever. While more expensive paints might deliver better color—buy them only if you can afford them. Or start with a few tubes to supplement a less expensive, student-grade pack. Good pencils are relatively cheap. Purchase single sheets of good paper for final drawings instead of whole blocks, and utilize sketchbooks for all other work. You can get a nib pen with various nibs for a good price and a bottle of ink—this is much more economical than pre-inked pens which wear out quickly and cannot be refilled. Purchase a small portfolio for transporting your works.

Items to start with:

- A good set of drawing pencils (I like Faber Castel, Blackwing, or Kimberly)
- A small set of colored pencils (I prefer Berol Prismacolors)
- A horsehair brush
- A can of workable fixative
- Good erasers (I like the barrel erasers best)
- A few good round and flat brushes
- An 80lb sketchbook
- A dip pen with a nib set and a bottle of waterproof ink

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1.4: Working with an Illustration Client



Spot Illustration of a parade from “Der Struwwelpeter” by Heinrich Hoffmann, Germany.

One way that illustration often differs from the Fine Arts is that the work is often done either in conjunction with a text (which we will discuss in the Publishing Workshop section) or with a client.

Creating an illustration project with another party can be a challenging and daunting prospect. You are not working to please yourself but another, who may be demanding, have little solid concept of what it is that they need, or may need you to work at breakneck speed while keeping a level of quality. Sometimes artists are asked to work beyond their natural styles to give the client what they need for their project. Sometimes the illustrator can use the work in their own self-promotion materials (like social media or website) and sometimes they work nearly anonymously. You may or may not be able to retain the rights to the work you create, depending on the agreements reached in the artist-client contract. And then, there’s that pesky problem of payment. How do you know what to charge? How to you ensure payment?

But working well with clients is a great way to build your artist’s portfolio and support yourself in your career.

There are things you will need to be aware of—some of which will apply to all of your illustrations and some of which are particular to working with clients—that you should be aware of before you undertake a project such as this.

This chapter will endeavor to tell you the “things I wish I’d known” about this process—so you do not need to learn them the hard way. We will discuss contracts, selling artwork, professionalism, and give a sample client-based illustration assignment (working with a local farm to create an archive of usable botanical illustrations).

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1.5: Assignment- Botanical Illustration

Dr. Jessica Boehman; Amelia Stepnowski; Donivan Bonilla; and Johanna Guzman

Botanical illustration has been a practiced and revered form of illustration for hundreds of years ([click here to for databases of historical botanical illustrations](#)). The botanical illustration is not merely observational; it relies on the artist to imagine what various aspects of the plant's life might look like composed in a single image.

Second, the botanical illustration should keep composition, form, color, line, and texture in mind to make an illustration that is not only informative but beautiful.

This does require close natural observation of the minute details of the plant's structure but also requires an element of time: what might this plant look like in bud, in flower, or when it is bearing fruit? How does the root structure work? Can we see, in one image, the posterior and the anterior, as well as the various stages of the flower and fruit? The illustrator must act as a researcher in order to be sure that the finished drawing will be as scientifically accurate as possible and show the various states of the flower in a single form.

Learning Objectives

- To mix close observation with research, creating an image not seen in nature
- To learn to accurately reproduce a natural specimen
- To consider line, color, and composition to make this not only a nature study but a work of art

Let's take a look at an historic example:

Maria Sibylla Merian, Giant Silk Moth (*Arsenura armida*), larvae of various species, and Purple Coraltree (*Erythrina fusca*) from [Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium](#), 1705, Germany. Hand-colored engraving. [Learn more about Maria Sibylla Merian here](#).



Maria Sibylla Merian, Giant Silk Moth (*Arsenura armida*), larvae of various species, and Purple Coraltree (*Erythrina fusca*) from *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, 1705, Germany. Hand-colored engraving.

The artist, German illustrator Maria Sibylla Merian (1747-1717) gives us a lot of information: how the anterior portion of the tree looks in its branches, shoots, and leaves (its lateral organs), and how the flower looks in bud and fully-opened. She has illustrated various types of larvae and moths that could be found on this plant, shown in various positions, and included their furred and unfurled cocoons, and a fully-grown Giant Silk Moth. The colors are vibrant, and the composition is not muddled: it allows us to see all of these pieces. She uses a lighter tone green-blue to show us leaves in the background. The background is a neutral color to allow the focus to be completely on the specimens she presents. Consider how she uses linework (here, in the form of engraving); this delineates the details, form, and volume of the plant and moths. She adds color in watercolor to make this vibrant and naturalistic. You must plan ahead if you choose to use color in a similar way: leave room for the color; too much linework will muddy the color.

Case Study: Botanical Illustration for a College Urban Garden in Queens, New York

Note for professors:

This assignment could easily be modified as “Botanical Illustration in Your Local Environment.” What’s important here is that the illustrator start with real life observation of a plant specimen. A finished class assignment could yield, over time, a fascinating archive of local plants. Students could determine which plants are introduced into the environment, invasive, or native. If this were a repeated yearly assignment, you might note that students cannot pick specimens that have been previously illustrated in your class.

Why this assignment?

There are several reasons I have chosen to start the course with this assignment. The first is that I want you to begin your exploration of the art of illustration in a way that is mostly observational. The rest of the assignments rely almost entirely on your imagination, but this one requires you to hone your close looking skills.

The second reason is that I want you to work directly with a client. Unlike Fine Art, illustration often involves another party: an author, an agent, a client, an art director, or an editor. The needs of these various parties must be taken into consideration. While we will mimic this in the rest of the semester using the professor as a stand-in for these various roles, here we will work with a real client: the students and professors who are farmers at Finca La Florecita, LaGuardia’s Urban Farm. As such, you will be working within the confines of a client’s needs, project specifications, and content.

Thirdly, we are working over time to document the various crops and plants that attract pollinators that are grown in the garden. This farm works to address food injustice in Queens, specifically amongst the student population, and the food will be used to supplement LaGuardia’s food pantry for students in need. The illustrations generated by this assignment will become part of an Open Educational Resource Archive that not only will document what has been grown here, but can also be used by professors in their classes here and in other schools.

Step 1: Choose a plant

Our trip to the Urban Farm will allow us to sketch, photograph, and observe the plant which we will be considering. Make sure to get plenty of photographs and sketches of:

1. Each side of the plant (anterior, posterior, and lateral organs)
 - anterior: the topmost part of the plant, where the shoot system emerges to create stem, leaves, buds, flowers, and fruits
 - posterior: the root system (**this may require some extra research if we are not able to extract a plant)
 - lateral organ: branches or shoots that grow out from the main stem
2. Any buds or flowers
3. Fruit or vegetable (the edible portion)

Be sure to learn and record for your botanical illustration:

Genus (type of plant) and species (specific name of the type of that plant).

For example: an Heirloom tomato would be labeled as such:

Heirloom Tomato

Solanum lycopersicum

(Solanum [genus] lycopersicum [species])

Project Specifications: Assignment: Urban Botanical Illustration

Client: Finca La Florecita

Final Artwork Size: 8.5×11"

Trim size: ½ inch border (trim) on all slides.

Color or black and white: Full color

DPI of scanned work: 300dpi print quality; save a copy as 72dpi for web

File color profile: CMYK for print quality version, RGB for web quality image.

- Before proceeding to your final illustration, I will first look at your sketches, comparing it to reference photos you have taken at the farm and further research you have done (buds, roots, etc.)
- Once you receive the green light from the professor, you may proceed to your final illustration, transferring your final sketch onto a clean sheet of paper.

The final illustration will be done on 8.5×11 paper. Be sure to leave a ½" border on each side of your paper to act as the trim area. This is also a COLOR assignment: you must solve the project using color; you may use whatever medium you choose. If you need to work bigger, please work proportionally bigger. We can scan and scale down the image to add the computer text. Be sure to leave room in your design for labeling of the parts of the plant, the latin designation (genus and species).

1.5x size is 12.75×16.5".

2x size is 17×22".

Keep it clean:

Beware eraser marks, clean up any smudges immediately, and spray your drawing with a workable fixative once you are finished in order to keep any friable media from smudging (this applies to color pencil, pencil, chalk pastel, or charcoal). If you are using watercolor or water-soluble ink, DO NOT spray your drawing as it will make it run.

If working digitally, please set your file stats to 300dpi, CMYK color profile for printing. Be sure to leave room in your design for labeling of the parts of the plant, the latin designation (genus and species). Once you are finished, you may copy your image into a new file set at RGB color setting for web use. Web quality resolution is 72dpi.

Be sure to clean up any mistakes and smudges and fix the levels to allow for a white background. (In photoshop: Image → Levels)

Scanning and layout on Photoshop:

Turn on the computer nearest the large scanner and login to Photoshop.

Open the Epson Scan program.

Scan at 300dpi, 48-bit color, highest quality image.

If you need to [photomerge](#) a drawing that is bigger than the scanner, you can scan it in pieces; start by scanning all parts of your drawing, making sure all of the drawing have been captured, and then open Photoshop.

Click File–Automate–Photomerge. Add all scans of your drawings in the file box and click ok

Flatten the finished drawing (right click on the layers menu → flatten) and copy the flattened file into a new document.

New Document:

8.5"x11" CMYK color profile, 300dpi

Paste your drawing in. If too big, go to EDIT → transform → scale and use the toggle until it is the right size.

Use levels to even out whites.

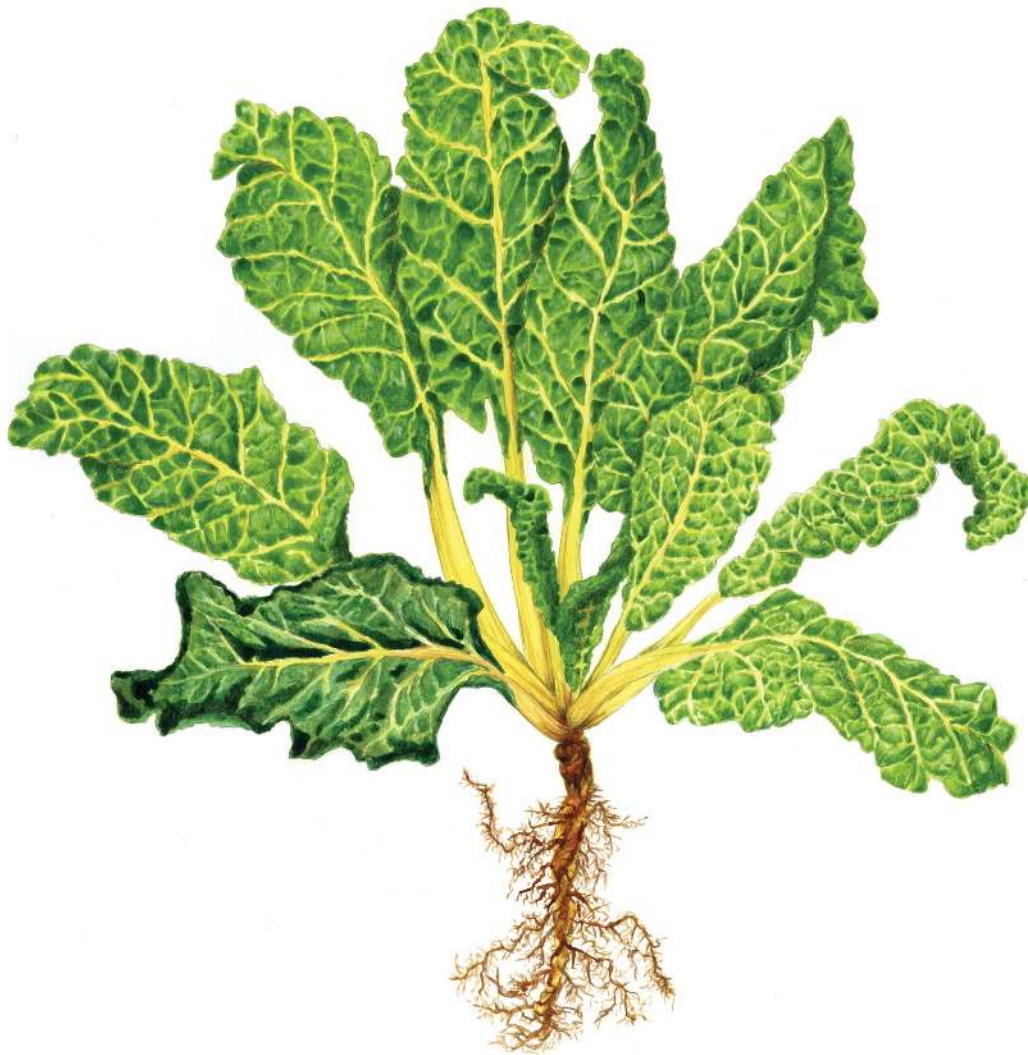
Clean up with stamp or eraser tools and hit save.

The background should be WHITE and the text should be added with **Bodoni 72 Smallcaps in size 24 in black.**

Text should give us the English name and then the Latin designation.

[Let's consider a student example from this assignment.](#)

Example 1:



RAINBOW SWISS CHARD
BETA VULGARIS SUBSP. CICLA VAR.

Johanna Guzman, Rainbow Swiss Chard. 2024. Colored pencil. Used with permission.

Let's discuss why this is a good example of a finished work.

What works:

The work is faithful to the original plant in color, texture, and scale. It clearly shows the root system of the plant. It shows the underside and top of the leaves. It is professionally presented according to the assignment prompt, on a clean white background with the proper name and designation in the proper font and size that was requested by the client.

What could be added:

How the plant looks as it develops. This would have required research on the part of the artist beyond what was observable.

Example 2:

A second student, Donovan Bonilla, also chose the Rainbow Swiss Chard plant, picking a variant that had vibrant red stems. On his trip to the urban farm, Donovan took many reference photos and then, in his subsequent research, labeled the parts of the plant he was able to identify. As part of this assignment is based on research, this helped him to recreate the parts of the plant that he needed to stitch together in the final illustration.

 Photo of Swiss chard in the garden.

Donivan Bonilla, “Swiss Chard from Finca La Florecita at LaGuardia Community College,” photograph, 2024. Used with permission.

 Labeled chard leaf.

Donivan Bonilla. “Rainbow Swiss Chard Leaf” photograph, 2024. Used with permission.

Other shots helped to see the way that the veins shone through the leaf when backed by sunlight:



Donivan Bonilla, “Rainbow Swiss Chard: Veins” photograph, 2024. Used with permission.

Or the way the plant changed shape and texture when it emerged from the ground. Since we were unable to pull the plant from the ground, extra research was needed for the roots.



Donivan Bonilla. "Rainbow Swiss Chard Stem." photograph, 2024. Used with permission.

The final image had to incorporate the many aspects of the plant while trying to capture its vibrant coloration. Digital media was a good choice to preserve the vibrancy and to allow for layers of detail and color to capture the crisp waxy color of Rainbow Swiss Chard.



RAINBOW SWISS CHARD
BETA VULGARIS SUBSP.
CICLA VAR. FLAVESCENS

Donivan Bonilla, "Rainbow Swiss Chard," Digital. 2024.

[Interview with a Student Illustrator: Amelia Stepnowski's Giant Heirloom Tomato](#)

Amelia let me interview her regarding her process in approaching this assignment. Read on to get a student's point of view.

Dr Boehman (JMB) Amelia Stepnowski (AS)

JMB: You had the Giant Heirloom tomato, a Belgium pink, no?

AS: Yes. I did some research, which was easier as it turned out my mom had the same tomato growing in her own garden.

JMB: Oh good. This was the first assignment we did, and I put it at the beginning for a few reasons. 1, I wanted to make sure the gardens still had plants as it was coming toward the end of harvest season. 2, I wanted you to have the experience of working with a client immediately, which, in this case, was LaGuardia Community College's urban farm, Finca La Florecita (Little Flower Farm after Fiorello H. LaGuardia, *fiorello* meaning *little flower* in Italian.) So we had pretty strict limitations on what we could work with: we had to work with plants grown on the urban farm, and the client was looking to have all of the parts of the plant represented (see above), including stages of the plant that were not observable as we were in harvest season, the plant's end of life. So some information had to come from student research. Did you find this assignment useful?

AS: Yes. I find all of the assignments useful, by the way. I found it useful because I don't really draw plants a lot, even though they are very interesting in shape, texture, and color. They're weird, they twist weirdly, they are dirty, and it was fun to try to capture that and to make it feel fresh.

JMB: When we took the field trip out to the farm to see the plants, how did you find that process from an artist's point of view?

AS: Difficult, because I tried to look at the plants with the abilities I had as an artist. For instance, there was this one really bumpy kale, and I knew that I would have a hard time trying to figure out how to draw that.

JMB: So one of the reasons you chose the plant you did was based on what you thought you could properly achieve?

AS: Yes, especially at the start of the semester.

JMB: That's fair.

AS: I did try to do something a little more ambitious, come out of my comfort zone a bit. I also tried not to pick a plant no one else picked, as that was one of the rules. Besides, I know tomatoes, I saw them everyday because we have them at home, I ate them. Very delicious, by the way. Homegrown tomatoes. Very delicious.

JMB: What was your process in the sketching and drawing? What medium did you use?

AS: In this case, my process was pretty simple, sketching with pencil. It's basically still life drawing except technically the plants are alive. I used sketches, photos, and references. I made still life sketches.



Amelia Stepnowski, Sketches of the Giant Heirloom tomato showing fruit, stalk, and leaves. 2024. Pencil, felt tip ink pen, and watercolor. Used with permission.

The sketching process was figuring out texture and color.

JMB: For your final illustration, you sketched it out in pencil?

AS: Yes.

JMB: And then added watercolor. Anything else?

AS: A little more pencil on top.



Amelia Stepnowski, "Giant Heirloom Tomato" finished watercolor painting on cold press paper. No text added. 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: What feedback did you get during this process? I think I did ask you to come back in with some more pencil on top, right?

AS: Yes, some more pencil for shading and tone. It just was a little too vibrant, which is fair enough as tomato plants aren't that vibrant outside of the fruits and flowers. I could see that all of my shading was color, so I needed a little bit more tone.

JMB: Were you able to observe all of these parts of the plant or was it partially based on research?

AS: Observation and prior observation (in her own garden). You have to watch how plants grow, so I got to see all of these stages in person. I also did the roots from research and observation.

JMB: So you pulled up the plant?

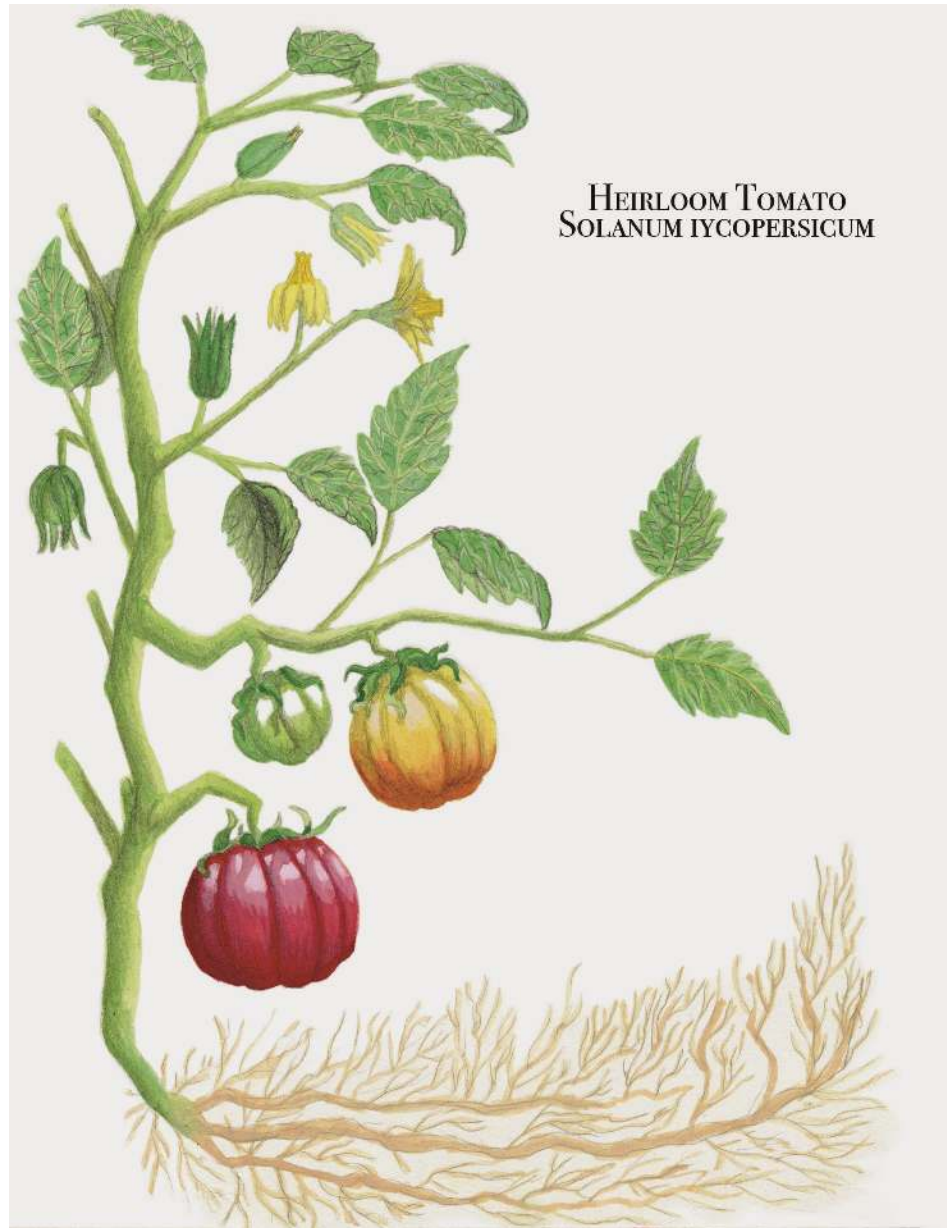
AS: A little, you could see some of the roots. It was hard to find internet references.

JMB: Yes, this was one of the challenges: getting the root system right. In terms of laying it out and scanning it, how did you find that?

AS: I had to plan ahead to leave space for the text labels we needed to add. And then scanning it to digitize it, I increased the size of the canvas.

JMB: Was it different working traditionally as opposed to digitally?

AS: Definitely. Working traditionally, you have to watch out in making mistakes. Of course, in pencil, you can erase as long as you do not draw too hard. And watercolor stains the page. I was lucky that I was able to lift the watercolor off in places. And then we edited in Photoshop.



Amelia Stepnowski, "Heirloom Tomato (Final)". Watercolor, pencil, and digital text. 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: What advice would you give to a fellow student approaching this assignment?

AS: I personally tried to make it look as accurate as possible within the scope of my abilities. My advice would be to try to do that: you have to try, so you will know what you can do.

JMB: Would you change anything if you could do it again?

AS: Yes, I would mute some of the colors slightly.

JMB: Which colors in particular?

AS: The colors of the leaves and stems.

JMB: So you would add red to tone down the green?

AS: Maybe darken it a bit because in reality the leaves are much greyer.

JMB: Getting greens right is always a challenge, especially working with paints out of the tube, there's a lot of mixing needed to get the hue right.

AS: But I am proud of the accuracy of the colors of the tomatoes themselves. They are very bright and saturated.

Key Takeaways

- The illustrator has practiced observational drawing combined with research
- They have practiced working in color
- They have practiced utilizing composition to create a compelling work of art
- They have started working to a client's project specifications

Extra Resources for Botanical Illustration

See the resources below for open access images and information

- [Elizabeth Blackwell, *A curious herbal* \(NYPL\)](#)- a collection of 500 botanical illustrations
- [Georgio Bonelli, *Hortus Romanus juxta systems Tournefortianum paulo* \(NYPL\), 1772](#)
- [La botanique mise à la portée de tout le monde, Paris 1774 \(NYPL\)](#)
- [Pierre-Joseph Redouté, *Les liliacées*, Paris 1805](#)
- [Georg Dionysius Ehret, *Hortvs, nitidissimis omnem per annvm syperbiens floribvs : sive, Amoenissimorum florum imagines...* 1768 \(NYPL\)](#)
- [Giorgio Gallesio, *Pomona Italiana*, Italy, 1814 \(NYPL\)](#)

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1.6: Assignment- The Illustrated Poster

Dr. Jessica Boehman; Donovan Bonilla; and Benjamin Alexander Taveras González

Approaching an illustrated poster: what to consider?

Posters have long been the domain of illustrators. They came into prominence in the late 1800s with the rise of simple color printing techniques like screen-printing or chromolithograph. Posters are ephemera, meant to be viewed for a finite period before they are pasted over with newer posters. Acting as advertisements for places, events, bands, movies, or companies, these posters are meant to be seen while the viewer is en route. Because they are read quickly, these posters need to be designed clearly, with an easily-digestible message.

What to consider when making a poster? Is your design eye-catching? Because a poster is a form of visual communication, be sure that it is properly communicating the idea you want to convey. Is there textual information? How prominent does it need to be? Can viewers learn enough information by looking at a poster, or will they be directed elsewhere with other means (QR codes or URLs)? Is your poster readable from the ideal viewing distance? (For instance, a poster meant to be read on the train platform from a passing train needs to have text that is large enough) Do you want the art and text to mingle or stay separated? You may want to play around with several sketches before proceeding.

An ICONIC Example:

 La Goulue by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

“La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge” by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 1891.

One of my favorite posters to share in any of my classes, “La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge” by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is an excellent example of the form. It’s lively, colorful, has a great composition, and leaves the viewer in no doubt as to what the poster is advertising. The name of the venue is not only in red for *The Red Windmill* of the *Moulin Rouge*, but it’s repeated four times. We know which nights to find this dancer, “La Goulue”, *The Glutton*, famous for her high-kicking can-can dancing and for gobbling and guzzling the snacks and drinks of the patrons as she danced. The colors, leading lines, and use of silhouette (in the faceless crowd of men and women) and the grey silhouette in her fellow performer, acrobat Valentin le Desossé, all lead your eye to *her*.

Now, that is not to say that one cannot design a more complicated poster, but the intent must be different. If the purpose of the poster is to get the viewer to *stop and look closely*, then having elaborate detail, properly rendered, can be a source of delight. Here’s an example:



Alphonse Mucha, "Zodiaque ('La Plume')," Color lithograph from multiple stones on tan wove paper, 1896-1897. Credit Mrs. Victor F. Lawson Collection. Art Institute of Chicago.

As you see, Mucha, a famous Art Nouveau designer, was renowned for his use of elaborately-detailed images of beautiful women in his posters and ads. The viewer generally has to search for the product or event his posters are advertising. However, they are so beautiful, that most people generally do not mind. This style of poster was in style for many years at the turn of the 20th century.

Here is one that has the sort of theme we expect to see in the assignment below: a link to the city's modes of transportation. Let's use it to see what works and what doesn't. Remember that illustration is partly design.



Willard Frederic Elms, "Art Institute by the Elevated Lines"

Color lithograph on three sheets of cream wove paper, laid down on fabric support,

Albert H. Wolf, Mr. and Mrs. T. Stanton Armour, Mary S. Adams, Stanley Field, and Joseph Brooks Fair endowments

The poster makes use of certain iconic imagery, easily recognizable even in its abstracted, simplified state: the lion statues in front of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the classical façade of the building. The silhouette draws the viewer in.

From a design point of view, however, there are some issues with this poster. The white lettering of the "Art Institute" against the negative space of the building's pediment makes the lettering hard to read, while the letters of "Institute" differ in size. Creating space in the composition for the text to naturally occur, or simply printing it in the same black of the lion and the "Elevated Lines" text would balance the composition and make the name of the museum easy to read. This is why it is always important to sketch first—*making sure to incorporate all necessary text into the sketch*—so that the text may properly fit within the composition in a planned and deliberate way.

It's good to consider color and boldness in your poster. One of the most iconic posters of the past century is J. Howard Miller's *We Can Do It*, better known as *Rosie the Riveter*, though that is an apocryphal title.



J. Howard Miller, "We Can Do It!" or Rosie, the Riveter. Photolithograph. The Smithsonian. 1985.0851.05.

Patriotic red, white, and blue is added through Rosie's blue collar work shirt and her red and white bandana; the bold yellow background emphasizes the primary colors. It creates great contrast and places your attention on the woman. The use of the word balloon makes this feel approachable, like a comic book cover, but effectively communicates the message that the woman is the one speaking. She's strong, tough, and ready to help. Message received—for both the intended audience of the women and for the secondary audience of the men whose significant others will clearly remain beautiful while they work.

The assignment

You have been working through this course to try different types of illustration. Now it's time to let your imagination wild with only one constraint. You may find that it is easier to set one or two constraints to help rein in your thoughts and spur creativity.

The Pitch!

You will be creating a vertical poster or horizontal art card for the MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority) of New York City.

- **The Client:** The NYC Metro Transit Authority (MTA)
- The poster must follow the required proportions listed below

- The illustration must relate in some way to the MTA—whether the subway, bus, Metro North, Long Island Railroad, or the stations.

The Challenge

The MTA is famous for hiring illustrators over designers or photographers for their [Arts for Transit initiative](#). Design an illustrated poster meant to be used on a train showcasing the best of your imagination and style. The MTA has hired you! So give them the best of your imagination.

Think of this last assignment as bringing together all of the lessons you learned in this class: narrative, line, value, color, composition, design—in order to craft a beautiful illustrated poster for your final project.

Some ways you can incorporate transit into your work:

- the subway
- the bus
- your neighborhood with train, bus, or subway
- platforms

You have seen posters on your daily commutes, and I am positive you have thought about what you would make if it were your turn. Moreover, [the MTA puts out regular calls for artists](#), so this is something you might get to do someday. Start thinking now! Now is your chance. [Here are some past posters for you to consider](#).

project specifications

You may choose between the vertical poster, which hangs above the just above the seats, or a horizontal artcard, which hangs just below the ceiling of the train.

- Vertical poster: 21×22". Include a 1/2" trim on each side.
- Subway art card should be 9.5" x 44".
- The poster should include the MTA logo.
- Should be in full color,
- Text should be added on the computer or carefully hand-lettered
- Scan at 300dpi jpg for your print quality image 72dpi for the web-quality image.
- Final poster must be presented professionally.

approaching the assignment

You will want to make at least three refined sketches to review with the professor in advance of your final work. Make sure you are considering composition, as the long poster is an unusual format.

Technical Considerations for this assignment

Consider what paper you will use if you are working traditionally. Do you have access to paper that is long enough for this assignment? Will you need to stitch two images together on Photoshop? If this is the case, you might plan a natural break into the illustration.

If you are working digitally, consider which program. A desktop program like Photoshop will give you the most power and flexibility for such a large file. If working on another program like Procreate, test out how many layers you will have access to with the dimensions and required resolution for this poster. This will depend on the power of your tablet. If you have very few layers, plan carefully and accordingly before proceeding.

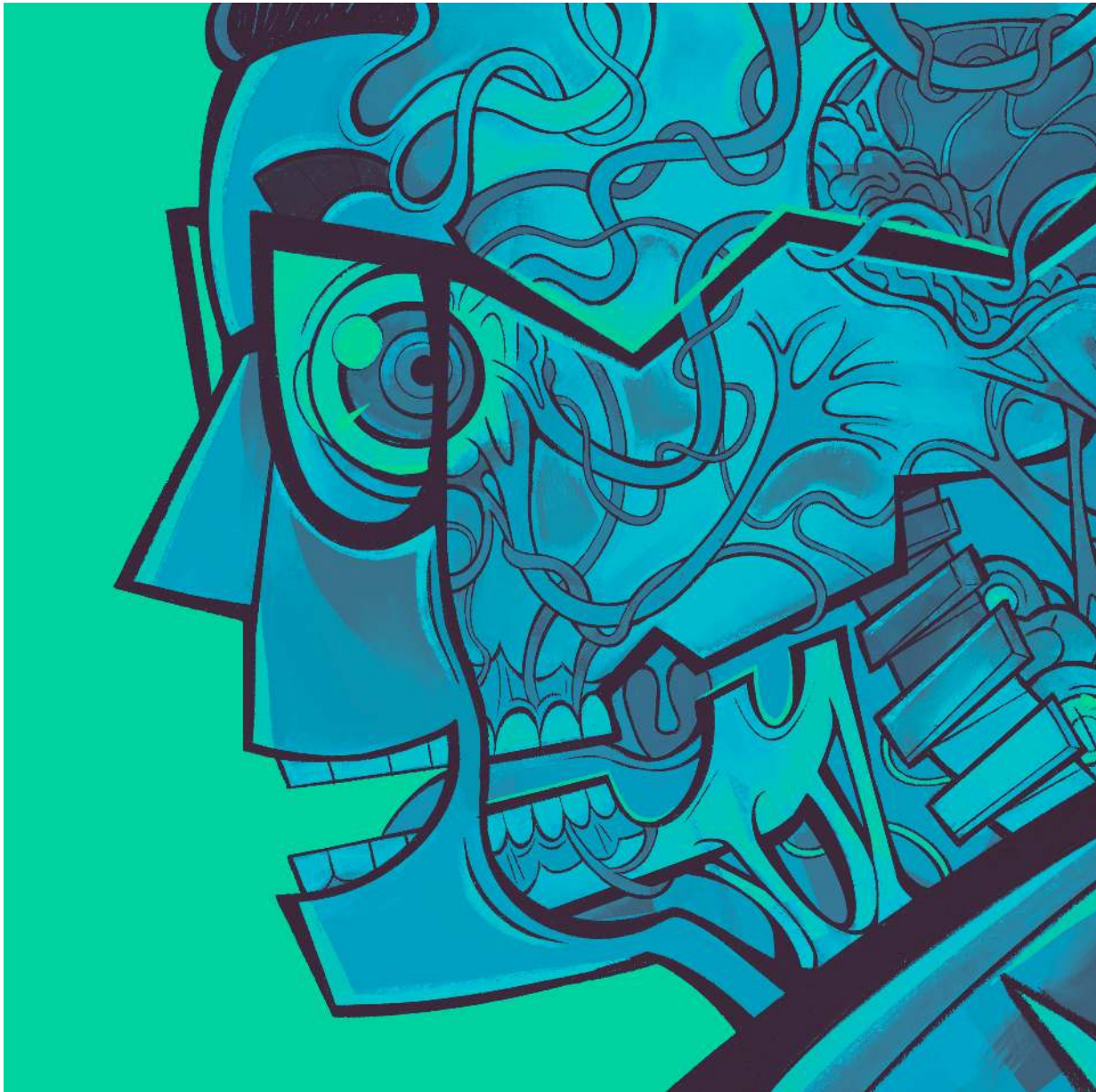
Student Example: Donivan Bonilla

Donivan played into his strengths of working in his graphic style for this poster to create an “art card”—the long poster designed to be placed over seats and doorways in the subway.



Donivan Bonilla, MTA Poster. Digital (Procreate). 2024. Used with permission.

If you look carefully, you see that he linked the inner workings of his mind with the track, stations, and the wirings of the J train, screaming down the track.



Donivan Bonilla, detail of MTA Poster. Digital (Procreate) 2024. Used with permission.

Donivan imagined what it would look like to have the posters used in-situ, a good test of the effectiveness of the illustration.

Donivan Bonilla, Mock-up of the MTA poster on the subway. Used with permission.

Professor's note

For this to match the assignment precisely, the artist should add the title of the work as well as the logo of the MTA.

Student Example: Benjamin Alexander Taveras Gonzalez

Read below to hear another process of making a poster specifically for the MTA.

(JMB= Dr. Boehman, BATG=Benjamin Alexander Taveras Gonzalez)

JMB: Did you find this project useful?

BATG: Yes. At the beginning, with a lot of major assignments, I felt like I was stuck. I had a lot of ideas I wanted to do for this project, and I knew time was against me, so I was able to be quick and find the concept and just decide. If I stayed and just thought about it—like I do with a lot of personal projects—it is hard to know where to start, and I get stuck. So it was good to just get started.

Also, I want to submit this to the MTA one day—it would be so fun. I didn't know they accepted submissions until we talked about it in class. That's so fun! I think that is one of the things I have as a goal on my artist's checklist.

JMB: Me, too! Do you think having the perimeters of “this must be related to the MTA in some way” help to give you a boundary to work within, so it was easier for your imagination?

BATG: Yes, if we didn't have that perimeter, I think I would have been lost. Those perimeters or rules made it so much better for me as a starting point. It has to be transportation related, though I made it fantasy-like, more expressive, but it still has a train. It made it easier to enjoy the process by having a base within I could explore my creativity. With illustration, those perimeters and limitations really help to navigate within a bubble of things you can do.

JMB: I agree. It just gives your brain something to focus on, and you still have free rein within that. If you look at all of the works by all of the students, they are completely different. One wouldn't think that fantasy and the MTA would go together, but in your mind, it did. So I think that's one of the nice things about illustration in general, is that you have some sort of limitation, but the challenge is to make your imagination shoot upwards within that smaller space. How did you approach the process of making this?

BATG: I did a lot of research about the trains, and spent a lot of time observing the way the lights reflected off the 7 train when I would be headed home at golden hour or nighttime, so I could have a starting point. I would stare at it and see how the lights played on the surface. I had a lot of pictures of the trains coming in.

JMB: That's interesting, because your picture has the trains running overhead through the night sky, and the 7 Train (Queens to Manhattan) is one of the few elevated lines we have, so that makes sense.



Benjamin Alexander Taveras Gonzalez, “Riding the MTA on Fairy Dust.” 2023. Digital. Used with permission.

BATG: Yes, that was a perfect reference since I knew I wanted it to be up above. In the beginning, I wanted clouds as tracks, but to make it more mystical, I thought of having the fairies lift the train and have their dust be the thing that lifts the trains from the city to the clouds. I had idea after idea and sketched it out. I grabbed a pencil and started scribbling in yellow to see the tracks of the dust. I had fun making the lines and arranging the composition. It was a lot of fun once I came up with my concept because of the freedom I had with the subject.

JMB: This has a good painted texture for a digital work. What program were you using?

BATG: Procreate.

JMB: So one of the things I wrote about in this assignment is that you might be limited in the number of layers you can have because of the size and resolution requirements of this image. Do you remember if you were very limited?

BATG: Yes, I think I only had three or four, so I had to keep merging. Sketching on one layer and then merging it, or working in a different file and import it and merge it so I could have more layers to play around with.

JMB: So that made you approach it more like a traditional work of art because you didn't have 200 layers to play around with. Did you have any artistic or cultural references when you approached this work?

BATG: Not really. I think I wanted to make it fantasy and mostly for kids to wonder and look at it while they're in the train. If I was a kid, I would love it. I wanted to have something to capture children's attention. Not cultural, but something universal. As for artistic inspiration: I looked at the sun, the nighttime—natural inspirations—merged with the mechanic, modern element of civic life we have now, combined with something carefree.

JMB: It kind of reminds me of Art Deco decor we have in the city with the luscious gold. It gives a shining city sort of feeling, like Rockefeller Center. Because this was the final assignment and late in the semester, it may have been different in the way that you

got feedback. Do you remember the feedback you got?

BATG: I remember you told me to change the figures in the windows—define or show the people in the windows. But I think this feedback, if I recall, was after I submitted the work at the final exam. You told me to keep in mind that it would be seen large, and not tiny, in real life. It will be expanded, people will see the details. So that made sense.

JMB: If you were to do this again today, what would you change, and why?

BATG: The same work?

JMB: Sure, you can answer the question as you like.

BATG: I would want to make the fairies have more drama, more variety, more diversity. I wish I had made the tracks out of fairy dust in the same gold color as if they were forming it with the dust.

JMB: That would have been difficult. I like the magical quality you got, and I really like how the gold looks gold and yellow.

BATG: It took a long time!

JMB: Because gold is different than you would think. You got those deep brownish tones in there. It works nicely. So what advice would you give to another student approaching this same assignment?

BATG: Would it be too hippyish of me to tell them to have fun and at the same time, to listen to the feedback you get? Find that balance. That comes easier with building a relationship with your professor. Because if I build that, I can have the confidence to tell the professor how I feel about the work that I am making. Because you have more experience, you will tell us what you see. But if we have trust, we can be more open to receive that feedback. The relationship I had with the professor made it a much better experience. I feel like if I was very shy, I think I would have felt more stuck, as I have in other classes. But because I was able to have a conversation, and have feedback and engage with you...I would tell the students to be open, to have a relationship with the professor, because she wants to see you succeed. Be open to hearing a different perspective, and have fun.

JMB: That's funny, because the challenge of that class for me is getting people to open their walls enough that I can come in and talk to them in a way that they don't feel defensive. Because it's hard to take feedback, right? You come in with your ideas and sketches, and you think they're the best thing ever, and someone tells you what you need to work on, your first reaction might be to put up a defense. But I think knowing that that person has your back and is not being critical and is trying to help you to do better—that's what I try to do. So each semester, it's like 20 different students that I have to figure out the right way to talk to them, and it takes me a while. Some people are naturally easier because they really want to be pushed.

BATG: You have to be able to realize that the things you do and think are being perceived outside of yourself. The metacognition. Having someone else tell you—this work needs a bit of this or that—if you can't step away and reflect on your work and have a different view of it, from a different angle—this is how others see it—this is something I struggle with a lot, to take my ideas outside of myself. But I need to trust: if someone tells me to jump, it's ok, you're not going to die—I would jump! I would jump and see how it is, rather than not changing—I can at least try. I can always go back, but seeing how something different would look can be therapeutic, too.

JMB: I remember this. It still can be difficult if people are critical. The way I see it: I'm not trying to change the way you make art, but maybe I'll try to get you to look at a work conceptually in a different way, and perhaps push you to see if you can do what you naturally do better. But I do push because I know you have the capacity and the ability and I want you to leave my class feeling like you've gotten better. But it's a lot of emotional labor! I am exhausted at the end of class, haha. I'm introverted, so it's tiring. But it's a great feeling (and then I get a good sleep).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Narrative Illustrations



The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. "The headless horseman—Sleepy Hollow." The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1876.

This section of the course will be dedicated to illustrations for illustrated books. As I approach comics, graphic novels, and picture books in my second-level illustration course, *Graphic Narrative*, here we will focus on learning various illustration approaches for what we call *middle grade* books: these are chapter books that include illustrations as well, generally for ages 9-12. Middle Grade illustrations are standard projects for illustrators, and test many things: how to keep a character consistent, how to work for an older audience than for picture books, how to make dynamic spot and full page illustrations—and how to do it all in effective, dynamic, dramatic black and white.

[2.1: Where do your Illustrations Belong?](#)

[2.2: Crafting Dynamic Narrative Illustrations--A Checklist](#)

[2.3: An Introduction to Spot Illustrations](#)

[2.4: Assignment- Two Spot Illustrations](#)

[2.5: Assignment- Full Page and Spread Illustrations](#)

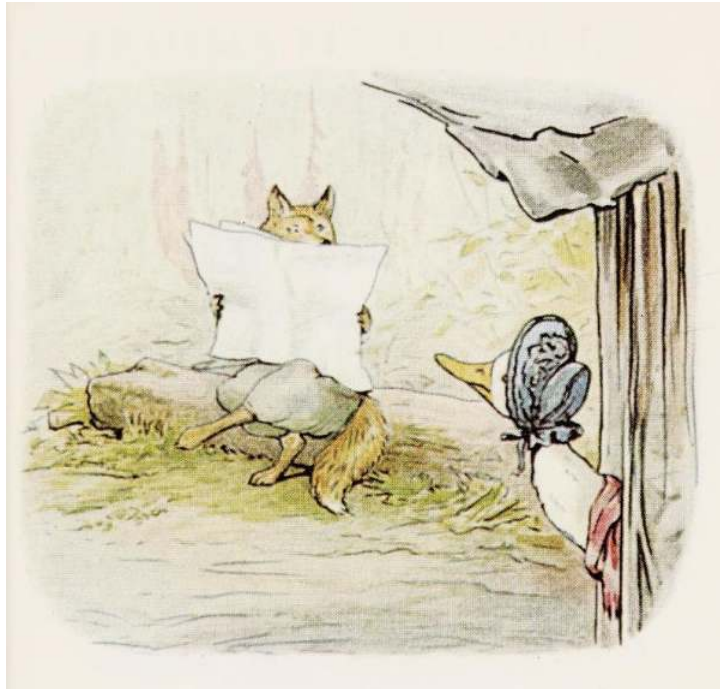
[2.6: Assignment- The Illustrated Book Cover](#)

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2.1: Where do your Illustrations Belong?

Navigating the Types of Illustrated Books

There are several types of books that call for narrative illustrations; as an illustrator, you should be aware of the differences between them, not only for concerns related to the age-appropriateness of style and theme, but also to know which type of book might suit your own style and interests best. Each type of book has slightly different needs and rules, and pitching for these various types of books require different types of portfolios.



Spot illustration of a fox reading a newspaper from Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*, Frederick Warne and Co., 1908.

Let's look at the common types of illustrated books, from youngest audience to oldest:

Board books:

These small, thick-paged books for the youngest audiences (think babies and toddlers who are being read to) are generally short in length (between 12 and 24 pages) because the thickness of the paperboard pages make longer lengths unsupportable in this format. The small format with rounded edges makes the books easy to hold, difficult to tear, and more able to withstand saliva, sticky hands, or being thrown, while the thick pages are easy to turn by children whose hands lack precise motor skills.

Stories in board books are the simplest, introducing children to basic concepts: letters, numbers, colors, sounds, letters, and language, animals and their babies, and family relationships are among the most common. Some include texture for sensory exploration; think of Dorothy Kundhart's *Pat the Bunny*, which had pages that allowed children to feel the softness of the bunny's fur, the scratchiness of Dad's beard, and so on.

Illustrations in board books tend to be simple, bright, and not very abstract. Oftentimes, illustrations rely on high contrast, which is the easiest for the youngest children to see.

Picture Books (Children's Books):

Picture books have become increasingly wonderful over the years, with rooms for many types of styles, visual complexity or simplicity, and a wonderful play between text and image. Some are even wordless. As most of these images are not open-access, let's link to the sites of some well-known contemporary illustrators known for their picture book work.

[Sophie Blackall](#) has won two Caldecott medals: the award for the best picture book of the year, granted by the ALA, the American Library Association. She is known for whimsical, colorful illustrations rendered in watercolor or watercolor and cut paper. Her book, [Finding Winnie](#), is an example of how she uses research in her books to make them beautiful learning experiences for children.

[Oliver Jeffers](#) works in rich oil or watercolor with simple characters, lush colors, and his trademark hand-lettering style. A good example of his style is [Here We Are](#), a guide to living on earth made for his young child.

[The Fan Brothers](#) work together to create a highly-detailed, whimsical, moody style. Their book, [The Night Gardener](#), is a good example of how this style can work in picture books.

Christian Robinson uses bright colors and a simple style to create his picture book world. His books [You Matter](#) and [Last Stop on Market Street](#) are testimonies to loving family and others.

Oftentimes, illustrators will work in conjunction with an author whom they may not meet or even speak to in advance. Some illustrators are author-illustrators who write and illustrate their own text. Some do both. You can decide what's best for you. Those who do both have the greatest flexibility when pitching to agents as they have the ability to submit entire book dummies, mock-ups of whole books for an agent or editor to see the whole scope of the story with sketched versions of illustrations.

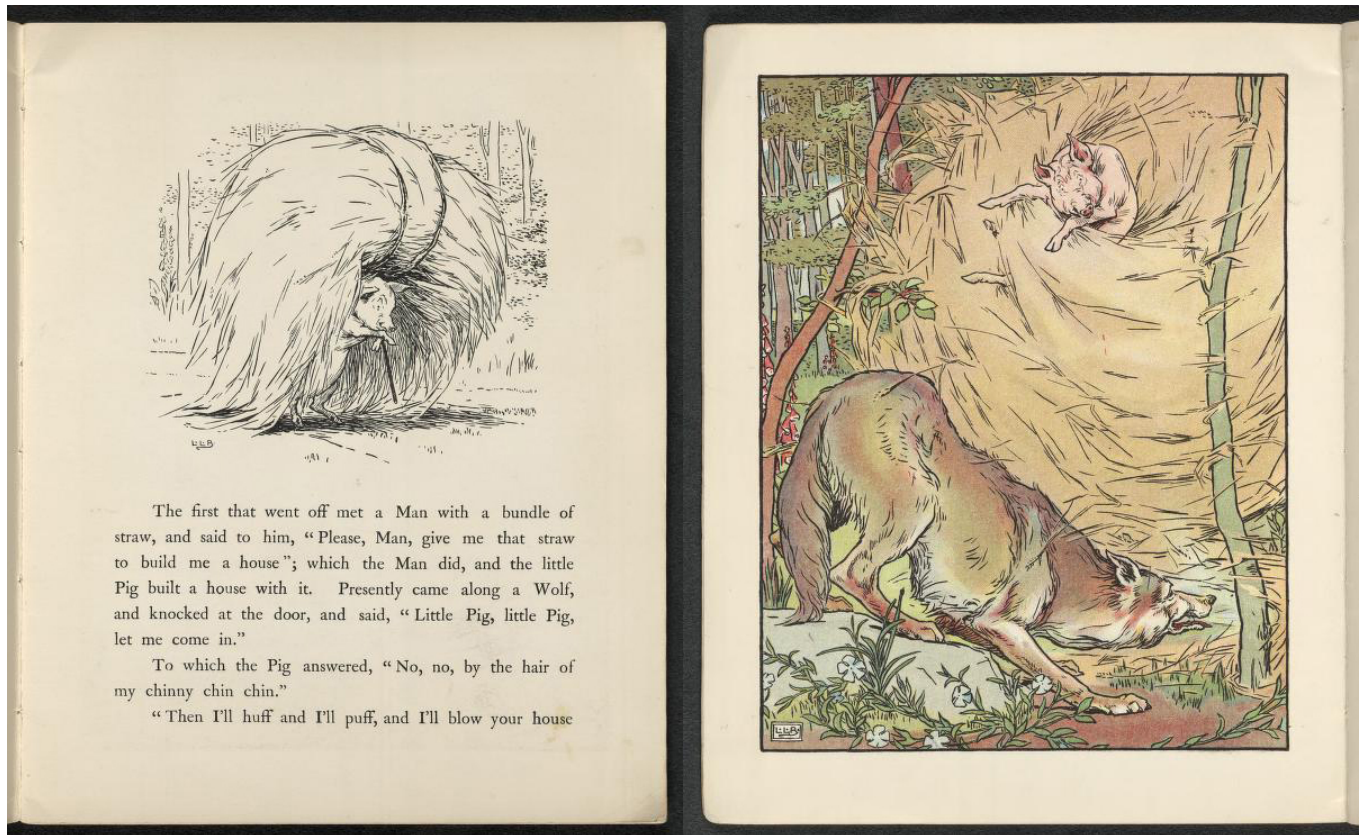
Picture books are generally 32 pages, but are printed in multiples of 8: 40, 48, 64, and so on are available to the illustrator, but less common than the standard 32. These pages include the front matter: title, copyright information, and dedication, leaving the number of pages to use for your story somewhere between 29-30. They can be hardcover or softcover. Hardcover books give the illustrator the ability to make end pages: decorative pages that bind the backs of the front and back cover.

Here is an example of endpages; you can see that Potter has added her characters as a type of introduction to the flavor and content of the book, but it also serves to illustrate the larger world of her books and beloved characters:



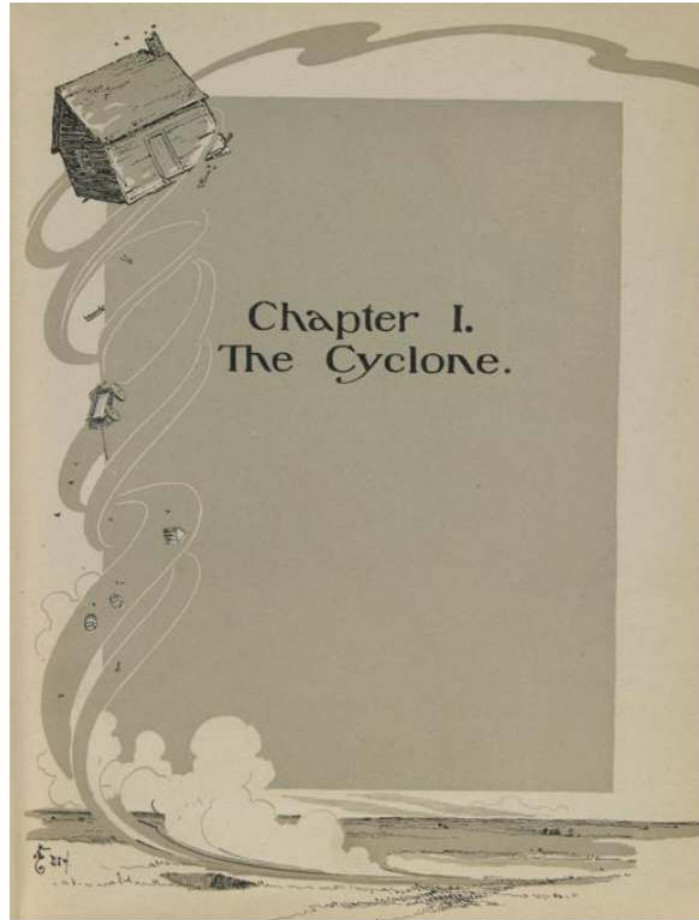
End pages from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*. Frederick Warne and Co, 1908

In the early 20th century, the format for illustrated books was simple: text on one page, black and white or color illustrations on the other. This was due to limitations of printing; mixing color images and text would come later. Sometimes there would be a spot illustration alongside the text. The format was predictable, rigid, and even boring, so all of the charm had to come from the illustrations themselves. *Here is an example:*



The Three Little Pigs by L. Leslie Brooke. London ; New York : Frederick Warne & Co., 1904

This style seen above, with a full page illustration on one side of the spread and a spot on the other, is generally more common in middle grade books, which depend more on the text. We see this much more in older picture books such as this, *The Three Little Pigs*, from 1904, whereas picture books now utilize every sort of format: splash pages, spreads, spots, even paneled pages that mimic comics. There are no limitations.



W.W. Denslow, Chapter I: The Cyclone for L. Frank Baum, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz"

Middle Grade books are young reader chapter books that straddle the divide between a picture book and a novel in that they still include illustrations. Often in black and white due to cost, these illustrations generally come in spots or splashes, but more modern books, like Jim Kay's *A Monster Calls*, are becoming increasingly interesting and elaborate in their use of illustrations integrated with the text. [Here is an interview with the author and illustrator that tells how they made the illustrations for that book.](#)

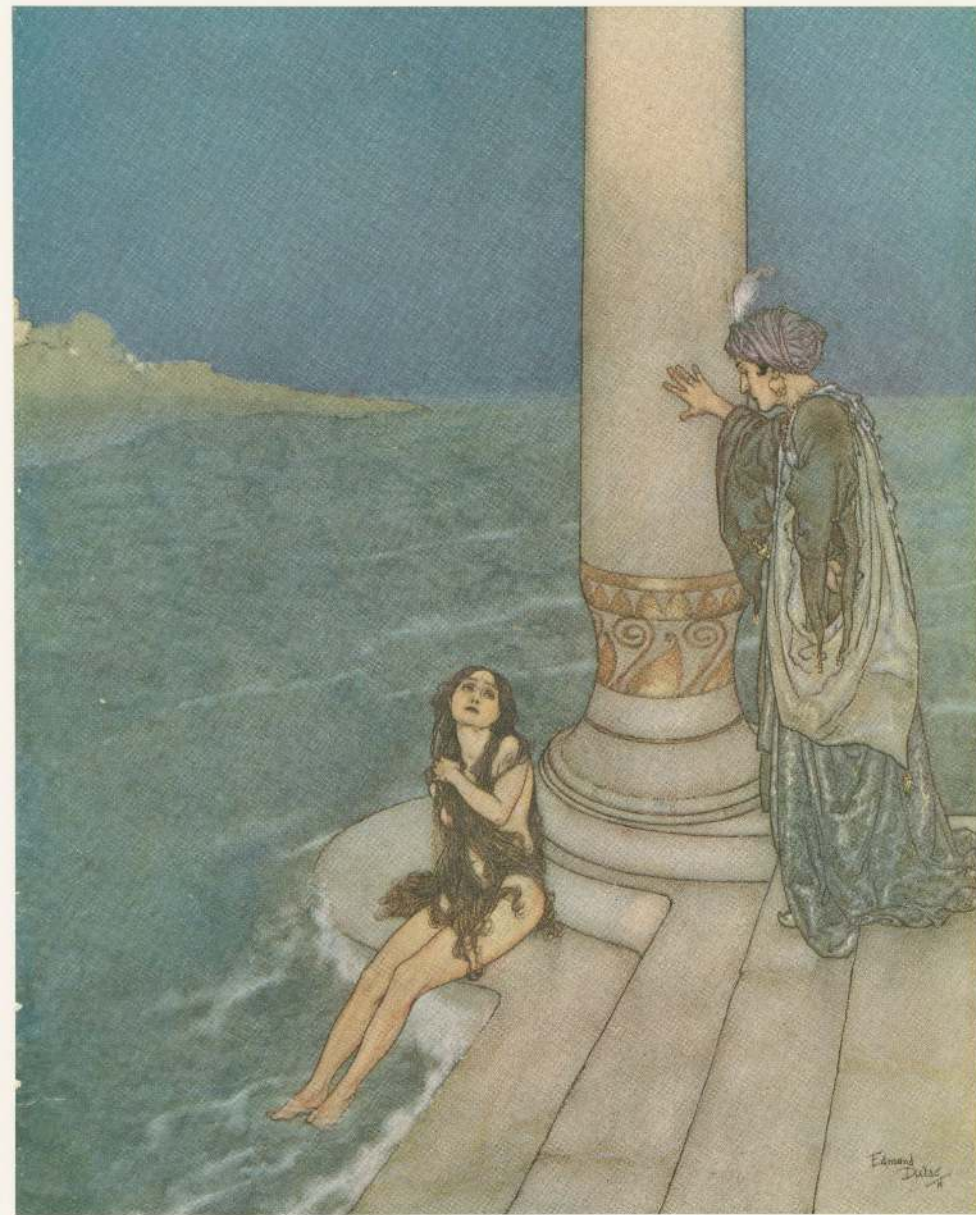
Middle grade books offer the illustrator great flexibility in playing with drama and character emotions, as the characters are usually older, allowing them to have greater adventures. Practicing drawing older children is a great way to prepare yourself for middle grade work, and a series of illustrations in this vein are a great addition to a portfolio, something we will discuss later in this book.



Gustave Doré, “Geraint and Enid Rode Away” from Alfred Lord Tennyson, “The Idylls of the King.” Wood engraving by William Ridgway.

The trend in the late 19th- and early 20th-century was to have elaborately designed engravings, like this one by French artist Gustave Doré, which filled in vivid detail that could stimulate the viewer’s imaginations toward the fantastic and the romantic. Beyond being beautiful to look at, as well as technically wonderful, these illustrations can teach the artist a lot about drama, composition, value, line, and perspective.

It was also popular to use oil paintings, watercolor paintings, or other color media printed in rich color in these older style books. Here is an example of a splash page by Edmund Dulac, who was known for his color. It takes a rich publisher these days to have Middle Grade books printed in this colorful manner. This is much less common today; artists are free to work in any media that can be done in black and white.



“The prince asked who she was and how she came there; she looked at him tenderly and with a sad expression in her dark blue eyes, but could not speak.” Edmund Dulac, for Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid.”

This focus on color is much less common today; but in working in black and white, artists are free to work in any media that can be rendered in greyscale, and can offer an excellent challenge.

So, where does your art belong?

Key Takeaways

- Board books have the simplest designs for the youngest readers, tending to be bright, with simple stories designed to teach basic concepts
- Picture books are vibrant, longer-length books for readers from ages 4-10, and can have elaborate stories, characters, and settings.
- Middle Grade books are often made in black and white, and are for older readers of about 10-12 years old.

Fun Fact: Many adults read picture books and middle grade books, too.

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2.2: Crafting Dynamic Narrative Illustrations--A Checklist

Telling a story with an illustration—getting the audience to believe the action and emotion of a page—can be difficult at the beginning, and it's worth sketching several thumbnails to take into account story, action, composition, value, and more. It always pays off to think through your illustration in several ways, not resting on your first idea.



Sir John Tenniel, Alice being attacked by a deck of cards from Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland". Wood engraving.

Learning Objectives

- Put into practice various visual elements that should exist in a narrative illustration
1. What type of illustration do you need for this scene? A spot, a splash, or a spread?
 2. Who are your **characters** in this scene? Are they recognizable? Are they age-appropriate?
 3. Does the illustration match the information in the text? Check to see that character descriptions, environment, season match the story.
 4. Does your image add to the story or repeat exactly what's in the text?
 5. What is the **action** taking place?
 6. Are there **emotions** the viewer should be able to read? Are the **emotions** clear? Perhaps have a second viewer weigh in on what emotions they read in your characters.
 7. What's the **mood** of the page? Are there visual elements in **expression**, **atmosphere**, or **setting** that can add to this mood?
 8. Have you chosen to illustrate a pivotal moment in the narrative?
 9. Where is the action taking place? Is the **location** described in the book, or must you invent this? Is it appropriate believable to the story?
 10. What time of day or night is it? Consider how **lighting** will play an important role.
 11. Will **color** play a role in the mood of the illustration? Will the lighting affect the color? Does the color palette work with other illustrations in the palette?
 12. Don't forget the rules of **composition**. Is your eye led to the most important part of the page? Have you considered line, tone, form, value, scale, rhythm, pattern, camera angles, and perspective?
 13. Lastly, check that your picture is communicating what you want it to communicate. If so, proceed to the final drawing!

before turning in your work:

Once you finish the work, you should double check that you have done exactly as asked.

Specifications

- Is the finished work the required dimension? If a precise inch or even pixel dimension has been given, be sure to meet it exactly, or your illustration will not work the way you have planned.
- Does it include the proper trim? If a spread, have you included room for a gutter, if needed?
- Has it been scanned to the proper resolution (300 dpi for print, 72 for web?)

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2.3: An Introduction to Spot Illustrations

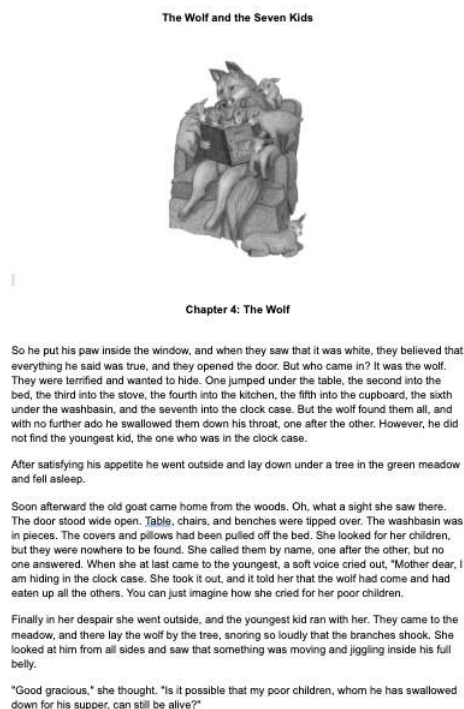
Why Spot Illustrations?

When starting an illustration portfolio, one great staple to test your skills in concise storytelling and your use of black and white is the spot illustration. An easy way to remember what a spot illustration means is to think that it literally only takes up a spot on the page—it does not cover a whole page. As such, spots are meant to work in conjunction with the text printed on that page. Generally—though there are always exceptions to this rule^[1]—spot illustrations may be found in middle grade (or older) books, which means they are generally printed in black and white. The main reason for this is cost; it's very expensive to print full chapter books in color. However, you should see it as a chance to develop your skills in black and white.

What Part of a Story to Tell in a Spot?

If I'm speaking in generalizations in this chapter, it's because there will always be another way to solve a problem in illustration. However, given the small nature of a spot illustration—it simply does not have the room to do too much—many spot illustrations pick very small details from the story to illustrate. Pick up your copy of any of the Harry Potter books to see that Mary GrandPrè, the first illustrator of these books, uses small illustrations at the top of each chapter. Think of a detail of Harry Potter playing Quidditch. Think of the Golden Snitch, a cauldron, a three-headed dog, or the Mirror of Erised. These were all her choices of spot illustrations: individual details, short and *relatively unimportant* narrative moments,^[2] or characters that can easily be distilled into a small illustration. She generally placed spots beneath the chapter title and the first sentence of the chapter itself, a classic approach to spot illustrations that has been standard in book publication for years, one that gives the reader a sense of what's to come in the chapter. If you look at [this illustration](#), you can see that her chapter spots became increasingly complex as she proceeded through the series, incorporating not just small items or single characters, but environment and even two or more characters in one spot.

Here's an example of using a spot as a chapter header:



A spot as a chapter header: a standard approach.

But of course you don't have to choose this location. You can embed a picture anywhere on the page—or even two spots on one page if they will fit. The most important thing is that the spot is on the same page as that scene from the story, and that the text still

can flow in a logical and legible manner.

The Wolf and the Seven Kids

Chapter 4: The Wolf

So he put his paw inside the window, and when they saw that it was white, they believed that everything he said was true, and they opened the door. But who came in? It was the wolf. They were terrified and wanted to hide. One jumped under the table, the second into the bed, the third into the stove, the fourth into the kitchen, the fifth into the cupboard, the sixth under the washbasin, and the seventh into the clock case. But the wolf found them all, and with no further ado he swallowed them down his throat, one after the other. However, he did not find the youngest kid, the one who was in the clock case.



After satisfying his appetite he went outside and lay down under a tree in the green meadow and fell asleep.

Soon afterward the old goat came home from the woods. Oh, what a sight she saw there. The door stood wide open. Table, chairs, and benches were tipped over. The washbasin was in pieces. The covers and pillows had been pulled off the bed. She looked for her children, but they were nowhere to be found. She called them by name, one after the other, but no one answered. When she at last came to the youngest, a soft voice cried out, "Mother dear, I am hiding in the clock case. She took it out, and it told her that the wolf had come and had eaten up all the others. You can just imagine how she cried for her poor children.

Finally in her despair she went outside, and the youngest kid ran with her. They came to the meadow, and there lay the wolf by the tree, snoring so loudly that the branches shook. She looked at him from all sides and saw that something was moving and jiggling inside his full belly.

"Good gracious," she thought, "is it possible that my poor children, whom he has swallowed down for his supper, can still be alive?"

The mother goat sent the kid home and to fetch scissors, and a needle and thread, and then she cut open the monster's paunch. She had scarcely made one cut, before a little kid stuck its head out, and as she continued to cut, one after the other all six jumped out, and they were all still alive. They were not even hurt, for in his greed the monster had swallowed them down whole. How happy they were! They hugged their dear mother, and jumped about like a tailor on his wedding day.

But the mother said, "Go now and look for some big stones. We will fill the godless beast's stomach with them while he is still asleep."



Two spot illustrations on one page.

Get Creative!

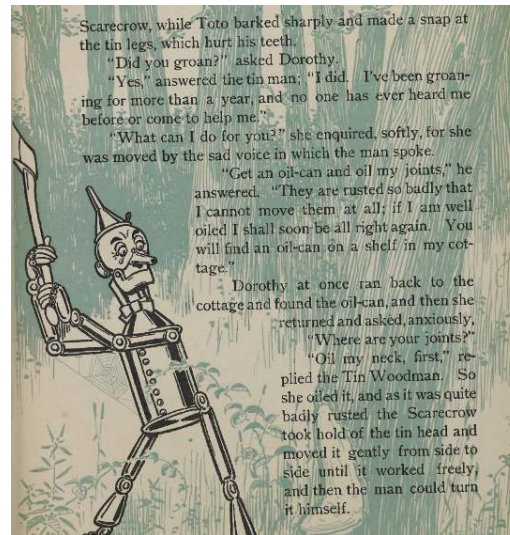
I generally counsel students to pick small moments from a story to illustrate in a spot. But again, there's ways around this if you really want to have fun with the spot.



Sir John Tenniel, Alice and the Cheshire Cat from Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland."

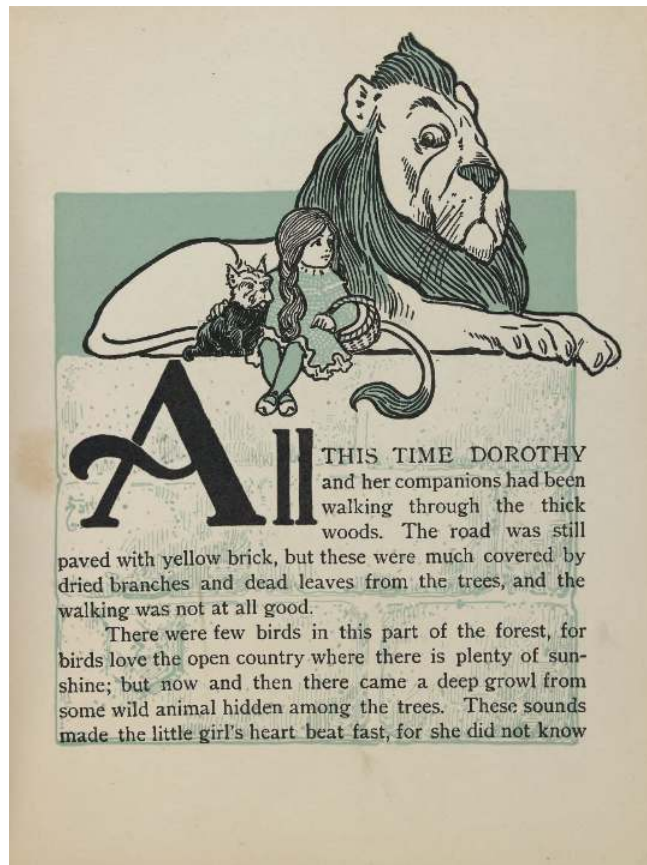
See this illustration for *Alice in Wonderland*. Tenniel has planned the composition to fit in an “L” shape so that the text may be inserted below. In the age of typesetting with metal type, this clear division was necessary. But it’s still deliberately planned out.

But not all spot illustrations are planned so well, and there are things to avoid. You do not want to overlap the illustration and the text as a general rule, unless the illustration is so light that it does not compete. But better to plan a space in the composition for the text. See here, in this illustration from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*:



W.W. Denslow, spot illustration of the Tin Man for L. Frank Baum's "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz"

You see that the illustration, printed in green and black, works well for the space with the Tin Man, which has the benefit of the contrast of the black ink, and is not overlaid by text. However, the green background of the trees competes not only in color but in texture and line: the shifting tones of the green bark of the trees and the white of the paper compete with the text. It doesn't work. Unfortunately, the artist repeats this tendency, even in the starts of chapter spots:



W.W. Denslow, spot of Dorothy and the Lion for L. Frank Baum's "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz"

This would work perfectly without the texture of the green below the illustration. Remember, the goal of illustration is to communicate, so if your chosen design obscures the words, you are not meeting that most basic goal.

Many authors, such as [Jim Kay](#), have gotten increasingly complex in their approach to spot illustrations. They can be spot spreads, taking up two pages as long as the text also plays a part. They can act as banners across the top or bottoms of one or two pages. This allows the artist to show more information in a spot than they had traditionally been able to do. For instance, [click through the images here](#) to see how illustrator Julia Sardà solved spot illustrations for The Folio Society's edition of *The Wizard of Oz*.

1. You may find middle grade books printed in color for special editions; spot illustrations can also be used in comics or picture book compositions. However, if an agent were to ask to see spots, they generally are referring to black and white illustrations working in conjunction with text. [2.03: An Introduction to Spot Illustrations#return-footnote-99-1](#)
2. Save the big narrative moments for full page illustrations or even spreads. [2.03: An Introduction to Spot Illustrations#return-footnote-99-2](#)

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2.4: Assignment- Two Spot Illustrations

Dr. Jessica Boehman; Amelia Stepnowski; and Donivan Bonilla

introduction to the assignment:

For this project, students will practice narrative spot illustrations in black and white, the traditional format for Middle Grade books. As this sort of illustration is an excellent addition to the illustrator's portfolio, we will focus on these aspects of illustration: composition of the drawing, layout and composition of the page itself, value, dramatic action, and quality of drawing.

Students, you are asked to pick a folk or fairytale of your choice.

Note to the Professor

Professors, you may easily change this to any sort of text you wish—we use folk or fairytales to allow students to utilize stories in the public domain and to give them the flexibility to incorporate stories from many different cultures. But this assignment can work with any story that's open access. You can edit or modify the story to require certain perimeters, such as: this story must be set in our modern world. It's up to you!

Step 1: Sketches

As the client will expect to see **THREE** refined sketches of each both spot illustrations next week, presented at the start of class. These sketches are meant to show different compositional solutions to the “problem” of each spot illustration. (I am expecting to see six sketches in total—three different compositions for two spot concepts). You will then receive feedback in next week's class and choose best of three finished sketches.

things to consider when sketching:

Spot illustrations typically illustrate a smaller point in the story—something interesting to add to the reader's experience. Some artists pick important inanimate objects (for instance, Cinderella's shoe), while others make small narrative moments (for example, Cinderella's pumpkin carriage racing through the night). It's up to you, but I'd suggest saving your biggest narrative moments for full page illustrations or even spreads. spreads

Choose two details in the story from different points in the story to spread out your illustrations—it's best to only have one spot per spread so the attention is not diverted from your drawing.

The illustrations must be fully contained—you do not want a figure, for instance, who is only shown from the torso up, cut off awkwardly. Be sure your whole illustration can be seen.

Spots will be incorporated into a page containing text, so when sketching, it's important to plan out where on the page the spot will go, and how the text will naturally flow around it. Spots can be nearly anywhere—as single-page or double-page banners at the top and bottom, as chapter headers, or embedded into the text. Some elaborate spots illustrate the entire page or spread, leaving deliberate room in the illustration for the text on one or both pages. As long as text is included on the page, it is still considered a spread. So, get creative!

Step 2: The final illustrations

Each spot should be scanned, cleaned up, and laid out with text as if it were on a real spread of the book of your story. That means that the part of the story you've chosen for your spot must align with the text of the story on that page. Be sure to add the appropriate border around the book when laying it out, including the page number and the title of the story, as it would appear in a compilation (see examples below).

Project Specifications

The book measures 8" wide and 10" high with a trim of 1/2" on each side of the page.

Pro Tin!

Though spot illustrations are small, you can and should draw them bigger and then scale to size later. This will make your drawing look tighter and more professional. (This is a good rule of thumb for illustration in general).

If possible (if you have a scanner at home), images should be scanned in and saved in JPG format at 300dpi, CMYK color profile (for for print), and saved again at 72dpi (web quality) with the file name saved as:

1. NAME-Spot-300dpi.jpg
2. NAME-Spot-72dpi.jpg

If you are working digitally, make sure your canvas is the proper dimension and that you set the DPI (dots per inch) to 300dpi before commencing.

Spot Examples

Here are some examples from the students. Read below to see how they approached this assignment.

- Donovan Bonilla's spots from "The Dead One Fell" folktale
- Amelia Stepnowski's spots from the "Baba Yaga" (A Slavic folktale)

Here are two spots from "The Dead One Fell," as illustrated by Donovan Bonilla, who chose to illustrate two spots from a small portion of the story. This meant that when he laid out the illustrations, both had to fit on one spread alongside the text.

Donivan's style is naturally graphic, and he leaned into the black and white, giving emphasis on a stylized character design and strong use of value. This is a good example of keeping your own style, even if it doesn't seem like a traditional fit for the subject matter: many students in this assignment revert to something like *looks like a fairytale*—fancy dresses that feel like they are from an older era. Donivan modernized the folktale by making the illustrations in his own style, not bowing to the timeframe in which the story was written. His use of dramatic lighting adds drama and gives the figure, otherwise rendered rather flatly, a sense of real form. The digital medium makes it easy to draw with a transparent background, which, when saved as a .PNG file is preserved; this makes it easy to easily format when dropped into a page of text.



Donivan Bonilla, “The Dead One Fell, Spot 1: The Boy.” Digital. 2024. Used with permission.

Because Donovan planned his second spot with a black background, this controlled how the page must be formatted for the final layout.



Donivan Bonilla, "The Dead One Fell, Spot 2: The Boy and the Skeleton." Digital. 2024. Used with permission.

Because the darkness was necessary for the narrative, he extended the black throughout the page and over the gutter, bringing the two pages together. It's imperative to leave room on either side of the page divide; this is the gutter. A good rule of thumb when laying out the gutter is to give a buffer of 1/2" on either side of the divide; this area will be lost to binding. Any text or images should have another buffer of at least 1/2" on either side of the gutter for natural formatting.

Notice that the illustrator used white text to pop against the black on the righthand side of the page. But he also added a bit of whimsy: the gradient he added on the text to make it look like it, too, is being lit by the candle: a clever detail that rewards the viewer.

Donivan Bonilla, “The Dead One Fell (final layout)”, digital. 2024. Used with permission.

Interview with an Illustrator: Amelia Stepnowski for “Baba Yaga”

Read below to learn more about Amelia’s process for illustrating digital illustrations for Baba Yaga, a Slavic folktale.

(JMB= Dr. Boehman; AS= Amelia Stepnowski)

JMB: Why was the assignment for spot illustrations useful?

AS: It got us in the mindspace of professional illustrations for middle grade books, which I was forced to read a lot of as a kid and I would only be interested in if they had pictures, because I appreciated the art and different styles.

JMB: So you found the books more approachable because of the illustrations?

AS: Yes.

JMB: Did you grow up reading picture books as well?

AS: Yes, and I grew up being forced to read any kind of book. Picture books just made it easier for me to process, because I love stories, but just not words.

JMB: Interesting. So when you were a little kid, did you have any sense looking at the pictures that these would be the sorts of things you would like to make? I mean, did you like drawing as a little kid?

AS: Yeah of course. I’ve been drawing since I could remember, when I was ambidextrous. And my mom used to pull the crayons from my left hand and put them into my right hand.

JMB: In terms of thinking about your illustration portfolio: it seemed to me that you were really excited to try illustration. Do you feel like having these illustrations in black and white and in spots is something useful to have in your portfolio for agents and editors?

AS: Oh definitely. So I love color, so that’s what I would usually use. And if not, I would just do line art. So doing spots in black and white helped me a lot with the importance of value in creating art, because it has to be readable.

JMB: Did you find the value aspect of it to be challenging?

AS: Yes, especially as you can't just use black and white unless you have that style. But I wanted to leave my comfort zone and work extra hard on trying to make it look the way I want.

JMB: Now that you dove in over the course of two assignments and three drawings for working in greyscale, do you feel like it helped you to think differently about how you use value when working in color?

AS: Yeah, putting color drawings into greyscale lets you see if the value is wrong. You don't want what many of my professors have called "the dirty dishwater"—when there is not enough value differential.

JMB: Yeah, I call it "mud." That's a good trick to make sure your color value is on point. So how did you approach the assignment or what was your process?

AS: In working on *Baba Yaga*, a Slavic fairytale, I was excited because it was something I had wanted to do for a while. I've always seen versions of it in the media and had never gotten around to making one of my own. When I started, I had a little trouble with how to draw the witch, because I made her into a caricature of what the media has made witches into.



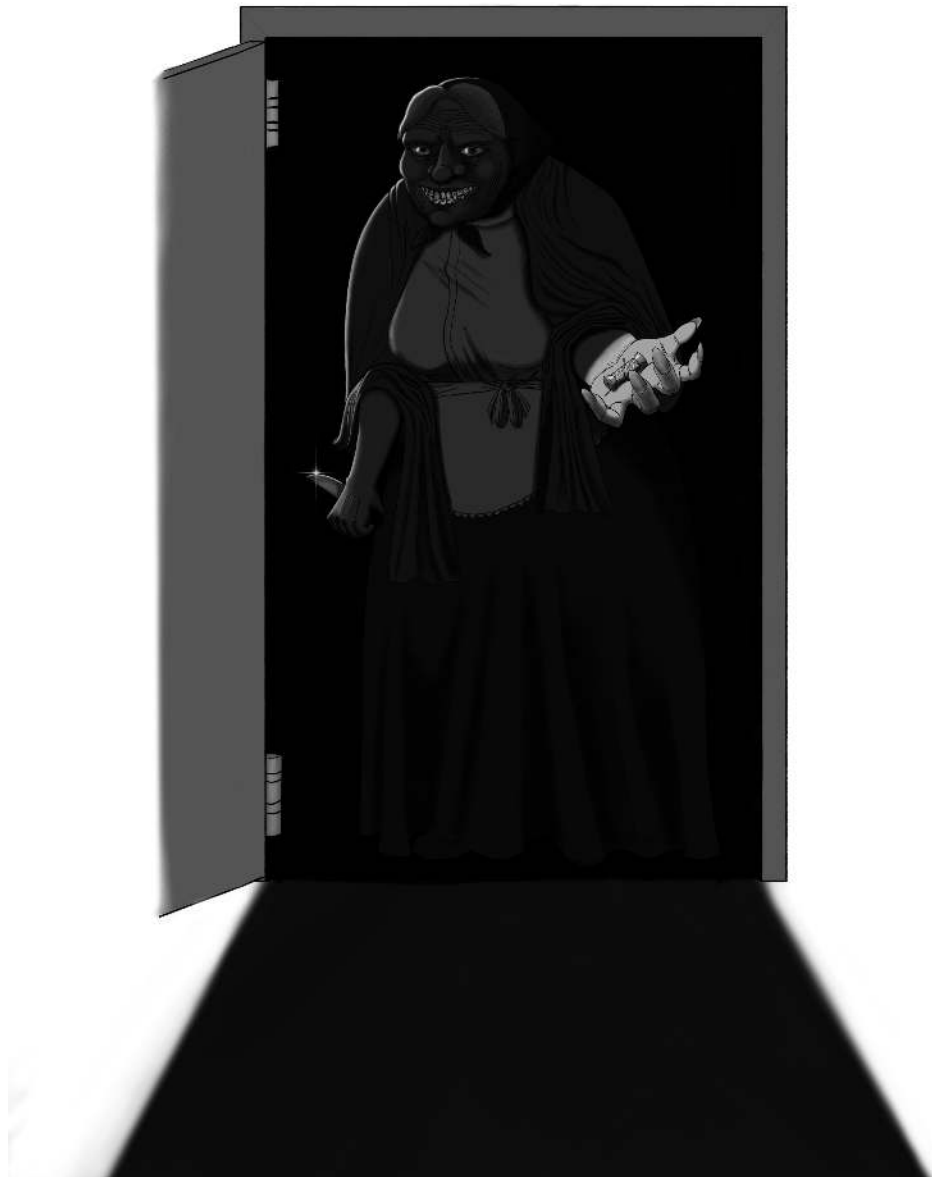
Amelia Stepnowski, Sketches of the witch Baba Yaga—reading more like caricatures. Pencil. 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: I remember that.

AS: So Professor Boehman suggested I try to find descriptions of her and also look into real elder people from Slavic countries, and honestly, I think the final result looks like someone you would see in real life, just slightly creepier.

JMB: Yeah, it reads as less cartoonish, less caricaturish.

AS: I mean, my style is slightly cartoony. You can tell it's an illustration but I try to keep the proportions correct.



Amelia Stepnowski, “Baba Yaga” final spot illustration. Digital (Adobe Fresco). 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: And the second spot was the iconic witch’s house.

AS: Yeah, the house with chicken legs. One version had one eye, the other had wings. And then I decided to combine a few of the sketches together to create the finished spot.



Amelia Stepnowski, "Baba Yaga's Hut" spot illustration. Pencil, 2024. Used with permission.

Amelia Stepnowski, “Baba Yaga’s Hut” 2024. Digital (Adobe Fresco). Used with permission.

JMB: So once you had your sketches down, what was the process for making the finished drawing?

AS: Oh boy. So the line art was the easiest part. I had to take various descriptions off the first version of the story and off the internet and look up what those meant. For example, it described her having a hooked nose. But that doesn’t mean it was long and literally hooked. It refers to the bridge of the nose. It said that she had metal teeth and silver hair. So I tried to represent that as well. And how you imagine an old lady who lives by herself, with long nails and weird hands.

JMB: Because that’s what happens when a woman lives by herself. (Laughs)

AS: Haha, no. It’s what happens when you live by yourself in a magical house and eat children.

JMB: OK, that’s fair. You were working digitally with a new program, Adobe Fresco.

AS: Honestly, it doesn’t have as many tools as other drawing programs, but it’s hard to blend, so rendering was hard. It took a really long time.

JMB: I remember that being a frustration for you.

AS: But I am really proud of how it came out because it did take so many tries. Adding a little, erasing a little, trying to make it look smooth. Adding texture to the hair or nails or the knife. The lighting was hard because it was a separate rendering.

JMB: And you were particularly proud of the spool of string. And the hands look good.



Amelia Stepnowski, "Detail of Baba Yaga". Digital (Adobe Fresco). 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: If you could go back and do it differently, would you still use Fresco?

AS: I'd do it with the same program, but know that I know there are blender brushes, it would be easier. This was my first time using it.

JMB: Do you want to talk about the cultural references of this?

AS: Sure, my parents are Polish and Baba Yaga is one of the tales we were told. It's just a connection to my roots and I like when I get to show off my roots because then I feel like my parents are a little proud of me for showing my culture.

JMB: Did you have any artists you were inspired by?

AS: Not really. I try to work from scratch without being influenced. I try to rely on my own research and experience. I am trying to do something original. Not relying on other people's ideas.

JMB: Something that's authentic to your own voice. What advice would you give to other students getting ready to do this assignment?

AS: Try your best, open yourself to other styles, and listen to others' advice. I was very lucky to have the help that I did.

JMB: Did you find it difficult in this class to work with a professor who is acting as an editor or a client as opposed to just a professor? Where if you were given feedback you had to take it as much as possible.

AS: No, I don't think so. I think it was very valuable if you are really considering going into the world of illustrations, and it helped me in the real world with internships I had. It was a really good idea to act in the role of the client.

Professor's notes

- It would be good to see these laid out on the page with text so we would get a sense of how it would look like as a finished spot on the final printed page.

Key Takeaways

In making spot illustrations, students have had the chance to:

- Work in black and white and greyscale
- Prioritize value
- Consider small narrative moments in striking ways
- Consider how images will work in conjunction with text.

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2.5: Assignment- Full Page and Spread Illustrations

Dr. Jessica Boehman and Johanna Guzman

In this chapter, we will consider your next assignment, the second of three book-related illustrations. We started with the spot illustrations, which forced you to distill a moment into a small illustration, cutting out extraneous information and focusing on simplicity. In this next assignment, you will have the entire page—a splash which extends to the edges of the printed paper, or even a spread if you choose to use the two pages for one illustration. This will allow you to choose a moment of character development, drama, world-building, or action: it's up to you! This is your chance to add to the world that the author has created and show how your imagination adds to this environment. It's time to consider your characters (*see the future chapter on character design*): are they age appropriate, in-line with the character description in the book? Do they show the proper emotion for the scene? Do not hesitate to model pose or emotion for yourself—or get a friend to model for you—in order to get the expressions of face and body accurate. Remember, the illustration must communicate what you mean it to do.

Things to Consider before you Start

*Always be sure to thumbnail your ideas. At least three sketches is a good rule of thumb to push yourself to think differently.

- Whereas your spot illustrations took one small aspect of the story, a full-page should focus attention on a part of the story that is very dramatic, exciting, or that particularly captures your attention.
- Use composition, line, and value to direct the viewer's attention to the most important part of the story.
- This is a narrative image! Portraits are not appropriate choices for full page illustrations. Be sure to pick a scene that tells a story.
- Be sure to ask yourself: how does my illustration add richness to the written text?

You will keep the same story that you picked for your spot illustrations, but this time you can stretch your legs—and your creativity—with a full page composition that tells the most dramatic, exciting aspect of your story.

assignment

Choose **one scene** from your story that sparks your imagination. Make **three** thumbnail sketches of your choice of full page illustration. NOTE: I am not looking for three different points in the story, but three visual solutions to the part of the story that you have chosen to illustrate. You should consider: setting, camera angle, composition, value placement, lighting, etc. to come up with three solutions. Sketches only!

Note for professors: Once the three sketches are complete, consider the worthiness of the the three and help the student to decide how to proceed with the finished illustration. At this point, you may want to ask for a combination of the three ideas, resulting in a further sketch, or even new sketches if they have not yet achieved the proper dynamism. We act as the editors, and this mimics the real-life feedback an illustrator would receive.

The Pitch

The Client: Candlewick Press

The Book: Urban Fairytales by the Brothers Grimm

The Pitch: Candlewick Press has hired you to create the interior illustrations for the a compilation book, Urban Fairytales by the Brothers Grimm. They will need one full page illustration and two spot illustrations (an illustration that does not take up the entire page and can be fitted within the text), and a cover design (we will be working on all of these projects together). The spots and full page illustrations should be in **black and white or greyscale**, while the cover should be in full color.

The Challenge

Can this story fit into modern, urban New York City? All illustrations must take place in New York City and be modernized. The style should match that of your spot illustrations.

Remember to design for good value and clear, dynamic composition. Don't be afraid of pure black and pure white.

*For this assignment, you will be designing three compositional sketches for a full-page illustration in black and white.

Note: You may do a double-page spread if you are feeling ambitious—simply double the template below, recalling that the two 1/2" bleeds in the center of the spread must not contain important information, such as faces, text, or other details necessary to the story.

Project Specifications

*The book measures 7" wide and 9" high. Keep in mind that is a full page illustrations should be full bleed pages, meaning that there should be an extra half inch border around each edge, should be 8×10." See the template below.

***All pages should be in black and white or greyscale.**

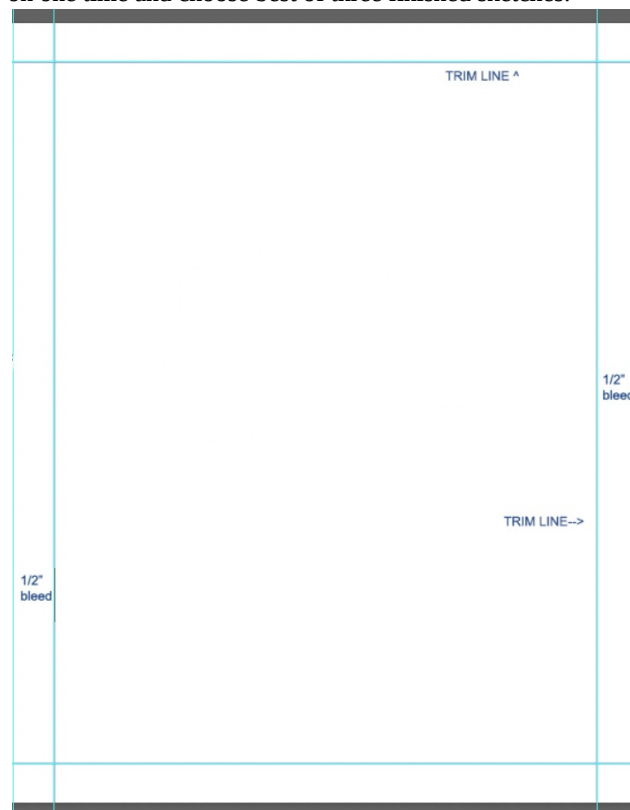
Traditional images should be scanned in and saved in JPG format at 300dpi, CMYK color profile (for for print), and saved again at 72dpi (web quality) with the file name saved as:

1. NAME-Full-300dpi.jpg

2. NAME-Full-72dpi.jpg

If you are working digitally, make sure your canvas is the proper dimension and that you set the DPI (dots per inch) to 300dpi before commencing.

Client will expect to see THREE refined sketches of different compositional solutions for the full page illustration. Professor will then give feedback during our one on one time and choose best of three finished sketches.



Example of a 7×9" template with 1/2" bleed

ILLUSTRATOR NOTES FROM A STUDENT

By Johanna Guzman

In this chapter, I'll talk about the full-page illustration, which is the second part of the three-part Fairy Tale project. I'll share the process I followed, the tips I picked up along the way, and what I would do differently if I had the chance to revisit it.

I chose to illustrate *The Mouse, the Bird, and the Sausage* by the Brothers Grimm. I hadn't heard of the story before, but I own a collection of their tales and decided to flip it open at random and committed to illustrating whatever story it landed on. The story is short, [please feel free to read it from this site...](#) but here's a summary of the story: a mouse, a bird, and a sausage live together in harmony, each with their own household duties. The bird gathers wood, the mouse handles water and fire, and the sausage cooks. One day, the bird is convinced by another bird that he is being taken advantage of and insists they switch tasks. The change leads to disaster – the sausage is eaten by a dog, the mouse dies trying to cook, and the bird accidentally burns down the house and drowns while trying to fetch water. Their once peaceful life ends in tragedy.

I picked the scene where all three characters are about to meet their grim fate because it is dramatic and a key moment in the story. I had to show three gruesome endings, so I decided to spread it across two pages, which was pretty ambitious since we only had two weeks to finish each project. It actually took me four weeks to get it done, but Dr. B gave me extra time because of the extra page. I'll share how I worked through the process to finish the illustration.

Thumbnail Sketches

I had already started sketching out ideas for the full spread while we were still working on the spot illustrations. Dr. B asks for at least three sketches per illustration, so I got a head start. Since the story I picked is pretty short, I planned out the full spread early on to get a better idea of where the two spot illustrations would go.

These were my first rough sketches. I like to work in thumbnail size because it's easier to manage. It helps avoid burnout; it's big enough to get the main ideas down, but not so big that you end up focusing on too many little details too soon. I usually keep them no bigger than a business card.



Johanna Guzman, Thumbnail sketches for “The Bird, the Mouse, and the Sausage”

Other versions:

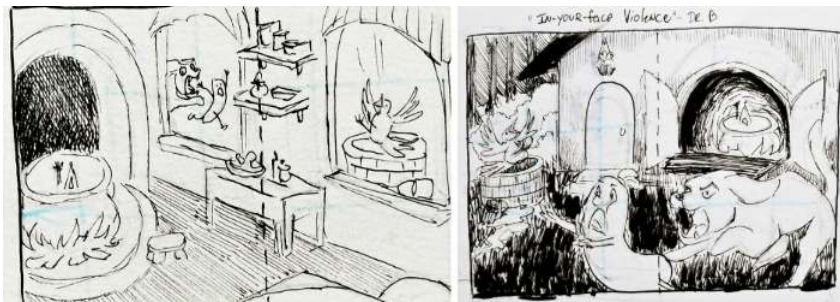


Johanna Guzman, "Alternate Thumbnail Sketches for "The Bird, the Mouse, and the Sausage"

Dr Boehman's Critique

The week we worked on the full spread, I had a decent number of thumbnails to choose from. It was basically a mix of individual spot ideas combined on one page. Honestly, it wasn't that great, and Dr. B agreed. At the start of the class, she asked how we wanted to handle critiques. She said she'd take on the role of a client and would give feedback based on whatever level we were comfortable with. I told her to go all in and treat me like I was dealing with the toughest client she's ever had. I wanted the real-world experience. The assignments were tough because I asked her to push me, but I think that approach led to a much stronger final illustration. Since the mash-up of spots wasn't working, she suggested going with a domestic environment scene instead. The idea was to come up with a composition that would fit all three moments and still be visually interesting. Her take was, 'Here's a lovely house where these three lovely characters live in, but wait, look closely... something doesn't look right.'

I made two thumbs, one for an indoor scene and another for an outdoor one. Because the illustration was getting more complex, I ended up needing two pages to fit everything in.



Johanna Guzman, Refined sketches for "The Bird, the Mouse, and the Sausage"

Dr. B really liked the indoor thumbnail because it had some calm, domestic feel to it. She also liked the composition. I had drawn each character's death framed inside arches without realizing it. Amelia pointed that out later on during the day we presented the final illustration. It turned out to be an intuitive compositional choice that quietly tied their fates together.

The outdoor thumbnail was more graphic, "in-your-face violence," which Dr B wasn't thrilled about. I actually preferred that one. Like a lot of my classmates, I had the tendency to lean into the darker, more violent illustration choices. But she was the client, so I went with the indoor scene. **(Note from the Professor: This is because we need to keep the audience in mind: this was for a Middle Grade book, where excessive images of violence are discouraged in imagery.)**

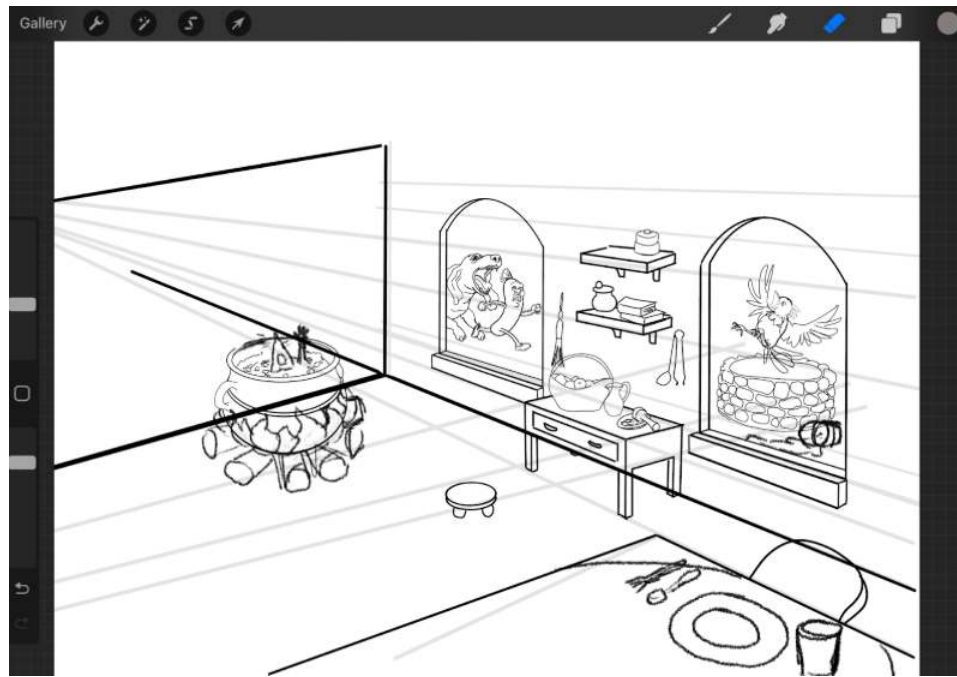
Here are the pages of sketches made for this fairy tale:



Johanna Guzman, Pages of possible compositions for “The Bird, The Mouse, and the Sausage”

Revisions and Final Composition

From the thumbnails, I used a water-soluble marker to sketch in the rule-of-thirds grid on each page. It is faint, the marker fades over time, but it helped at first with placing the focus areas. Later, I realized the thumbnails didn’t match the aspect ratio of the actual page size we were supposed to use. The final illustration had to be 8×10 inches per page, and I was doing a two-page spread, mine needed to be 8×20 inches (****plus the trim and gutter***). I had to redo the sketch to fit that size while still keeping the composition aligned with the rule-of-thirds I had planned. The fastest solution I found was to take a picture of the sketch on my iPad and do line drawings in Procreate.



Johanna Guzman, Laying out the drawing in Procreate.

I work on a computer every day, and my eyes get strained pretty easily. I enjoy making digital illustrations, but these days I prefer working traditionally to cut down screen time. Drawing in Procreate was wearing my eyes down, so I just focused on the perspective guidelines and refining the focal scenes. For the rest of the space, I decided to wing it. I brought the sketch into Photoshop, resized it to match the final paper dimensions (two sheets of 12×9 inches taped together), printed it out, and lightly traced it onto my paper using carbon. After that, I went over the traced lines with a 2H pencil and kept the strokes light. It is important not to press too hard so you can erase it easily and avoid spending extra time cleaning it up later in Photoshop.

Research and Ink Rendering Swatches

At the start of the fairy tale project we had to choose the style we wanted to illustrate our story. I started practicing ink drawing the previous semester and wanted to continue it. This project was a good opportunity to get better at ink techniques under the guidance of a seasoned illustrator. Last semester I was practicing on my own.

I bought and borrowed several how-to and reference books. Here are a few that I own, and a link to the Youtuber who specializes in ink illustration content.



Inking References.

Resources for Ink Drawing:

Gustave Doré Remastered (*The Divine Comedy*)

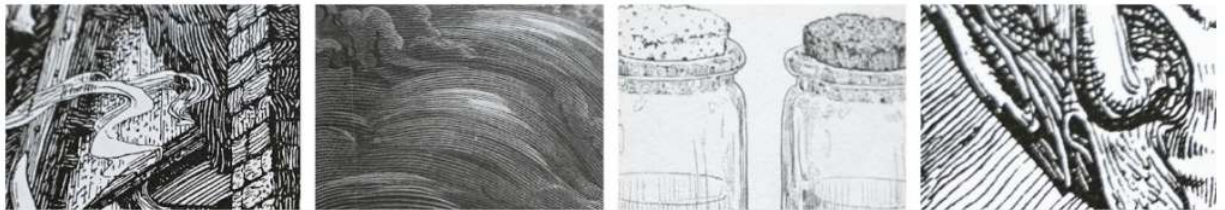
Alphonso Dunn – *Pen and Ink Drawing Workbook* (Volume 2)

Henry Justice Ford – *Maidens, Monsters and Heroes: The Fantasy Illustrations of HJ Ford*

Chloe Gendron Tutorials

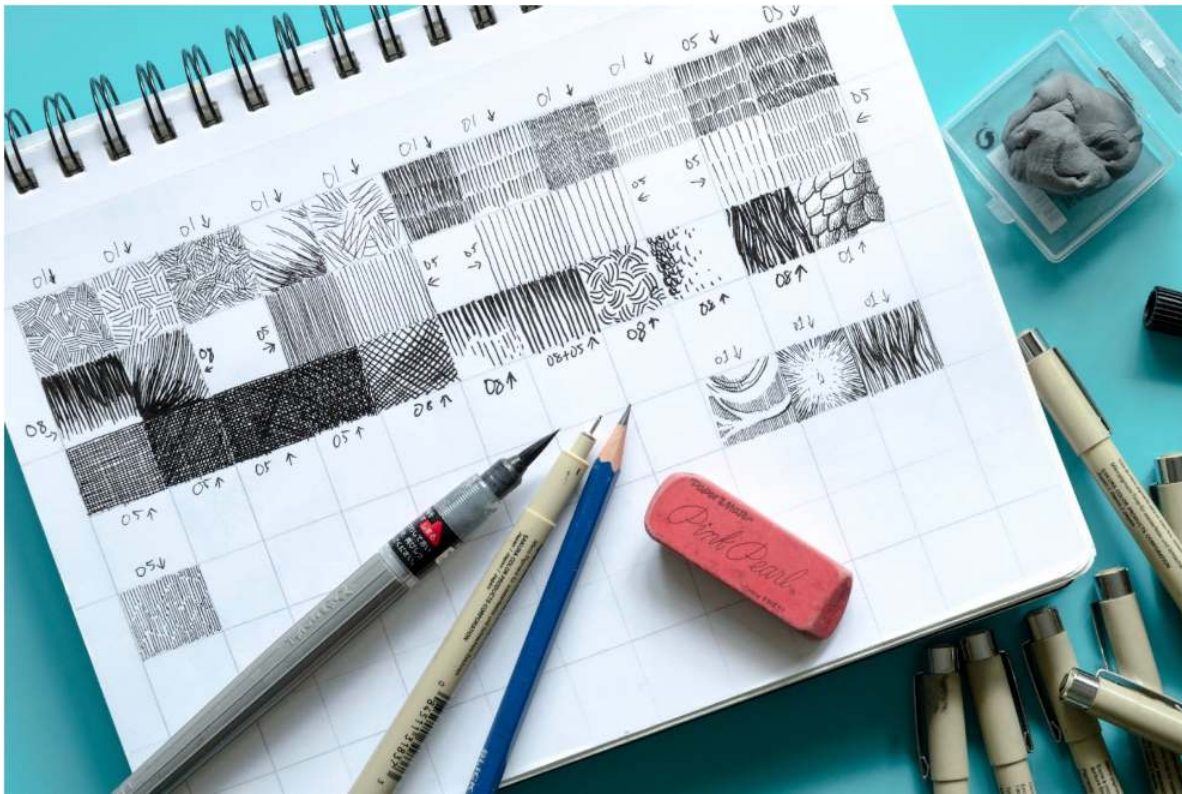
Chloe Gendron shared a tip that I still use today. Ink, like all other techniques, takes mileage to master. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, focus on studying just a small section of an illustration at a time. I used that advice to look closely at how different artists render elements that are in my drawing such as wood panels, brick, glass, cloth, stone, smoke, highlights, and shadows.

Here are a few of the small areas I studied and turned into simple swatches:



Samples of ink textures from various illustrations.

The ink swatches are small boxes where I practice rendering different textures. I keep them pretty simple so I can reuse the techniques on various objects. Whenever I come across an interesting or unfamiliar ink texture, I draw it in my sketchbook and test it out using different Micron pen sizes. These swatches have stayed useful over time, and I keep adding to them whenever I find a new reference or technique I like.



Johanna Guzman, A swatch page of ink textures in a sketchbook.

One important thing to keep in mind: if you plan to add a color wash over your ink drawing, you'll need to use waterproof ink. The Sakura pens I used weren't waterproof. You can buy archival waterproof pens, or go with a fountain or dip pen and use bottled permanent ink. The bottled ink is the more economical choice in my opinion, but very tricky to handle if you're just starting out. I tried it first and ended up making a mess on my first spot illustration. Since the ink was permanent, I had to find a way to cover it up. After that incident, I decided to stick with Micron pens and skip the ink wash entirely.

The Drawing Process

Drawing the spread was slow. I had to keep a steady hand for all the straight lines, carefully shade the walls, and make sure the line thickness stayed consistent. That part gave me wrist cramps, so I had to work in short sessions. For areas with highlights, I used a worn-out .005 Micron pen with low ink to get thinner, more delicate lines. For the darker areas, I filled in large sections using a brush ink pen.

I made plenty of mistakes during the linework and covered it up with white ink. The downside to white ink is that it tends to clog Micron pens if you draw on top, so I had to be extra careful to avoid many corrections in the future. I used a bunch of reference photos for the household objects, shaded everything with pencil first, and then drew over it with ink. Once the first layer of ink was completely dry, I removed all the pencil lines using a kneaded eraser.

Add more values and darken the darks

Once the first layer is done, it becomes much easier to figure out your shading and values. Take your time with it. You can start by shading a section with pencil, which makes it easy to change things if something doesn't look right. Start inking once you're happy with the shading. Keep repeating this process until the overall values feel balanced.

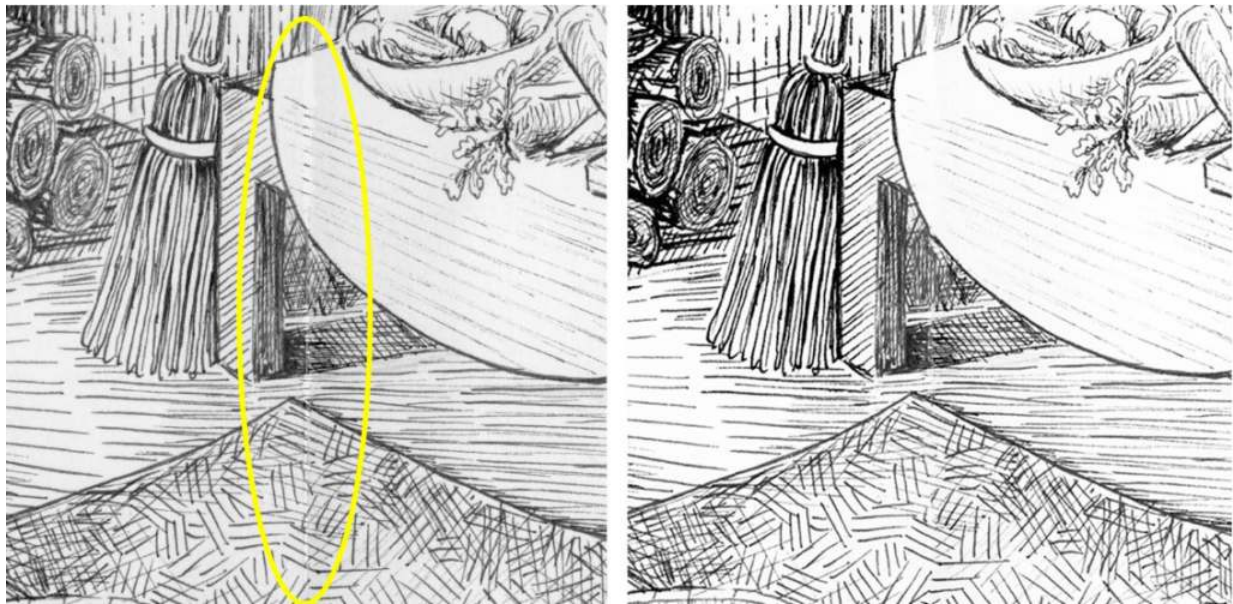
It's important to have strong contrast in your focal areas since those are the spots the viewer's eyes will be drawn to first. In my illustration, the area with the highest contrast is the mouse boiling in the cauldron. I planned it that way to pull focus. Then, as the

viewer's eyes move around the pages, the rest of the story starts to unfold: the sausage about to be eaten and the bird falling into the well are revealed almost like a theater scene with curtains drawn halfway open.

Scanning, Stitching & Cleaning

I drew on two separate pages, so I had to stitch it together in Photoshop. I won't try to explain the whole thing here. [This video does a way better job explaining and walking you through.](#) Honestly, following a video tutorial is easier than reading sequenced instructions.

In my merged pages, the images did not line up neatly. You can clearly see where the pages met, so I used the Stamp Tool to clean up the area. The video covers how to use the stamp tool too. After stitching and cleaning, I adjusted the Brightness and Contrast to make the lines pop more.



Johanna Guzman, Merging two illustrations: left: the illustration does not match. Right: it has been adjusted to match.

The Final Illustration

The final piece turned out pretty great. There are definitely some spots I would tweak like the fireplace (which I kind of overworked) but when I step back and look at the full spread, the small mistakes don't bother me anymore. I still need more practice with stone textures, but overall, I think it came together nicely, especially given the tight deadline.

If I could go back, I'd suggest my past self to sketch and do all the line work for the furnishings and household things in Procreate first. It would've saved so much time and stress. Being able to move things around and test the layout digitally is way easier than sketching directly on the final paper and risk damaging it.

Also, if you can, invest in permanent Micron pens. Using ink washes for shading is way quicker than line work like I did.

If you're on the fence about taking Illustration, go for it. It's challenging, but you learn so much and end up making pieces you're actually proud of.



Johanna Guzman, Final Spread from "The Bird, the Mouse, and the Sausage," Ink. 2024.

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2.6: Assignment- The Illustrated Book Cover

Dr. Jessica Boehman; Arnold Tatis-Algarin; and Isaac Ramos

We *do* judge books by their cover, don't we? At least, in the world of art, we do. The cover's job is to get a reader to pick the book up amongst a sea of choices. It could be bold, graphic, colorful, playful, humorous, creepy—and it must not give too much away. A cover illustration must be conceived of differently than a narrative illustration, for it must encapsulate the feeling of an entire book—not just illustrate an important scene. It's the visual thesis statement. It mixes design with illustration, and must include text.

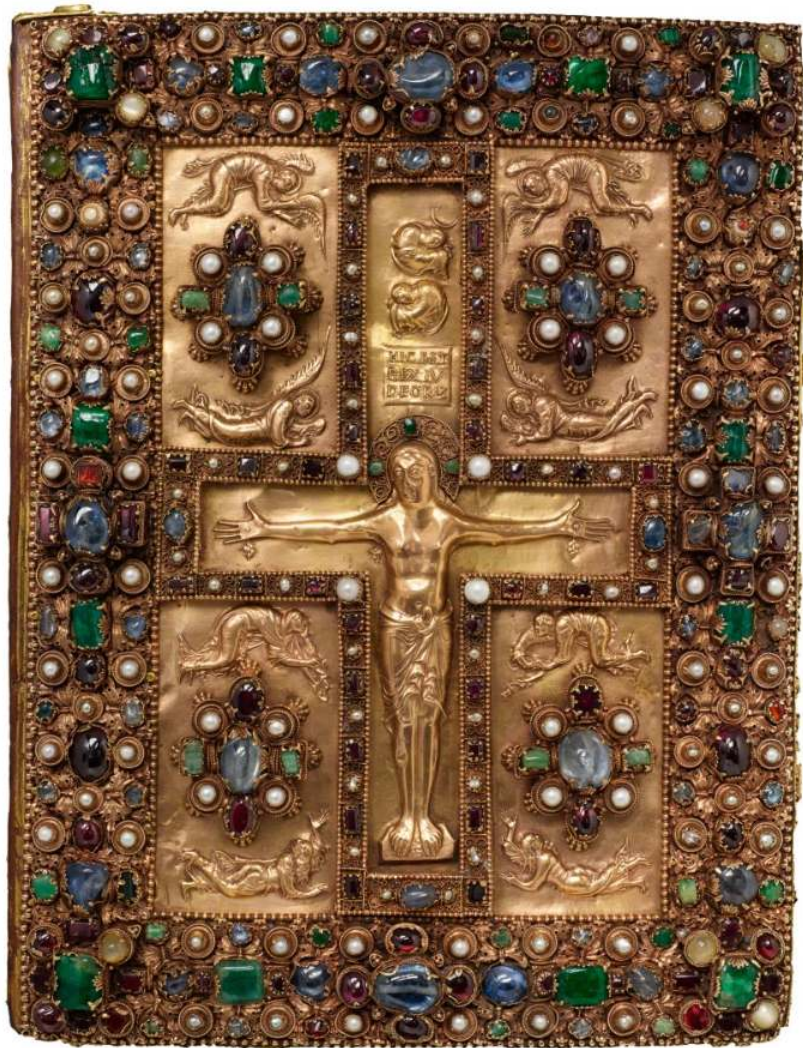
One of the great, fun challenges of a book cover design is that it can stretch across the spine, through to the back of the book, and even over the interior flaps, if desired. Though the front cover is most important, the back needs to leave space for a summary, promotional blurbs, and ISBN number and barcode. An illustration needs to plan for these things at the start instead of trying to cover an illustration.

Due to the nature of an open-access textbook, I can only embed images here that either are in the public domain or that we have permission to use. I will link to books with iconic design, but please also consider these older examples that still endure.

[The Book Cover Throughout History: A Very Brief Look](#)

In centuries past, book covers were precious items of gold and jewels—these bindings for a codex were considered fitting offerings for what were, essentially, extremely expensive, labor-intensive offerings to God.

Consider the 9th-century A.D. jeweled cover for the *Lindau Gospels* in the collection of the Morgan Library: the staggering expense of the cover lets us know that the contents inside are priceless, a rare, couture work of art:



Jeweled Cover of the Lindau Gospels, France, ca. 875. Gold repoussé Crucifixion and ten mourning figures, including personifications of the sun and moon. Workshop of Charles the Bald, grandson of Charlemagne. On: The Lindau Gospels, in Latin; Switzerland, Abbey of St. Gall, between 880 and 899. Manuscript on vellum. Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1901.

After the invention and proliferation of the printing press in the 15th century, and the eventual rise of printing with industrialization, book covers became the domain of illustrators, starting in the 19th century (1000 years after the Lindau Gospels above). Much more inexpensively made, but some still utilizing gold leaf, new colored printing techniques, or embossing, covers still were meant to tantalize the viewer, to get one to touch, open, and read the book.

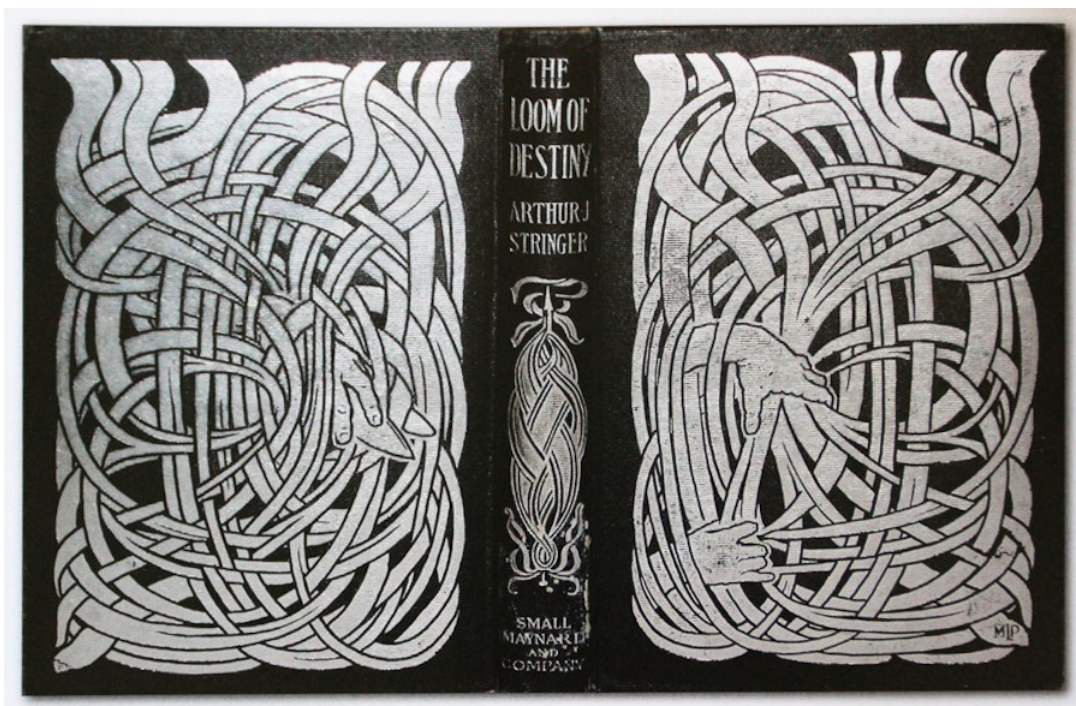
While today, the author's name and title of the book is given priority, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, this was not always the case. How much better to tempt the viewer with a clever or beautiful illustration on the theme of the book? The title, after all, would be visible on the spine, the part of the book which would be visible when the book was housed on the bookshelf.



Friedrich Christian Accum. *A Treatise on Adulteration of Food and Culinary Poisons*. London, Longman, 1822

Take, for instance, the cover for *A Treatise on Adulteration of Food and Culinary Poisons*. The gold leaf cover shows us interlocking snakes and a poisonous spider in the middle of her web, with a skull and crossbones with inscription above: “There is Death in the Pot.” So much more inviting than the rather drab title, no?

As does this silver-embossed cover, whose elaborate designs are interwoven in spirit—if not in actuality—over the front, back, and spine:



Arthur Stringer. The Loom of Destiny. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1899

The Pitch

We have done two previous assignments based on a single story: the two spot illustrations and the full page illustration. Now, we will practice thinking conceptually and graphically for the last of the narrative assignments by designing a book cover. It's time to think about what image will be the perfect thesis statement for your book: the one that sums up the feel of it without giving away the story.

We are preparing as if a press wants to print your book based on your fairytale. You will need a front, spine, and back cover image to fit within a prescribed template.

[Take a look here to take inspiration from lots of great examples that are not in the public domain.](#)

Read carefully. Cover designs should:

- be clear
- be in color, unless deliberately chosen to be in black and white
- be graphic
- be easy-to-read
- be eye-catching
- prioritize the title and author's name *(title should be largest, author name should be about 50% of the size of the title)*
- consider the spine design, which should include author's name, title, and publisher logo
- consider how the front and back work together
- leave room for a blurb, the publisher's logo, and a ISBN code

The book measures, 7×9", which is 8" wide and 10" high including the bleed. With a 1" spine, the total cover should be 16" wide and 10" high. The back cover should be on the right side, the spine in the center, and the front cover on the right side. I've made a template for you below that should help you to visualize this.

*You do not need to design inner flaps of the cover.

Basic Layout template for a book cover including trim lines and spine.

Utilizing a Template:

If you use a template, you can use it as a measuring guide for working traditionally or import it into whichever digital program you prefer and keep it as a locked layer at the top of your drawing. Most templates will be transparent—this one is not, so you can reduce the opacity on it or sketch on a layer over top of it. As you work in sketch phase, you can make sure nothing of import falls within the gutter or bleed areas. Be sure to extend the color to the edge of the bleed—not just to the trim line—if you want to have color to the edge of your printed, trimmed page. Once you start drawing, you can hide the template layer.

Proceeding with the Assignment:

Client will expect to see three finished concept sketches in color. Be sure to receive approval from client (professor) before proceeding to the final work.

Interview with student Arnold Tatis-Algarin

Read below to hear their thoughts on design and on the process of creating a cover for folktale *El Silbón*

(JMB= Dr. Boehman; ATA=Arnold Tatis-Algarin)



Arnold Tatis Algarin, *El Silbon* final cover with spine. Ink. 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: Do you think that this particular assignment of working on a middle grade cover was useful?

ATA: It absolutely was, working within those perimeters. It was useful being able to explore more of my strengths as an illustrator and the mediums I was most comfortable with and the way I was able to utilize them. This project in general was my first real experience using ink with a small no. 2 round brush and a dip pen with two general calligraphy nibs. It was something I always wanted to try and never really had something to use it for until now (Professor's note: the three assignment arc of narrative illustrations for middle grade required black and white for the first two assignments; students were free to use color for the cover). The whole project helped me to explore that medium and make me realize it's one of my strong suits.

JMB: So what did you like about the ink?

ATA: It's an unforgiving medium—I mean, whatever you put down is whatever you put down, so I guess that unforgiving nature really helps to build confidence as an illustrator in terms of your line work and your composition.

JMB: Did you feel like you had to really plan out where you made your marks, or did it become more comfortable as you went on?

ATA: A bit of both, actually. At the start (for the spot illustrations), I had to go through three separate drafts as I was getting used to it, because before I drew very spontaneous. With ink, you have to strike a balance between being sure with what you want to do—a plan, a sketch—with the free flowing nature of the medium itself. Once you get comfortable, you can just do what you want, as long as you stay within those perimeters you make for yourself at the beginning.

JMB: This particular assignment, out of all of the assignments in this course, is the closest to design, as opposed to illustration. And I always say that Illustration is the child of Fine Art and Design. So do you feel like that came into play with this particular assignment?

ATA: Yeah, absolutely. To be honest, I haven't really gotten into graphic design just yet, but I do find it has some sort of influence in terms of how I think about my art. I've always been drawn to really graphic illustrators, like Saul Bass. I just find his style of design work to be the best. It's simple but it's not—I would say that being simple, to the point, is more difficult than it looks.

(Professor's Note: [Saul Bass](#) was a prolific graphic designer from the 1950s through the 1980s, working mainly in logos and iconic movie posters and their animated opening credits).

 Saul Bass, Anatomy of a Murder poster with black cut out body against a yellow and red background

Saul Bass. Anatomy of a Murder. Lithograph. 1959.

JMB: So you're saying it's more difficult to be simple than it is to be complicated.

ATA: It's antithetical to the general opinion of art in general, especially from an outsider's point of view, to see simplistic shapes and colors as not real art, like they look at Jackson Pollock, and they say, "My fetus can do that." But, once you immerse yourself in that world and get familiar with the fundamentals, it's not simple at all. The hardest thing about creating art, especially for a professional, is to keep your ideas simple and readable.

JMB: That's one of the ways that design in illustration has such a big influence. Because design needs simplicity, but in order to achieve that, it takes tremendous skill. In order for it to function properly in a simple way, you have to be precise, have a lot of attention to detail. You're looking at every little detail.

ATA: And you have to be really confident in your abilities as an artist, and your style especially. You need to find everything that works with you as an artist in order to translate these grandiose concepts into something small and to the point. That's what makes Saul Bass' work function. In the Anatomy of a Murder poster, we look into it, it portrays the concept or general idea of a movie. It works as a thesis statement to the movie. The amount of time and effort you had to go through to get to that point.

JMB: A lot of experience. I mean, it's possible it didn't take him that much time at all. It's hard to tell. For instance, the I Love NY logo [was sketched out on a napkin in a taxi](#). I mean, it was changed from there, but the original concept was quick. And then designer Paula Scher of Pentagram said something to the effect of, "If I don't get it in my first try, I am not going to get it." So I think it's the life experience of looking. This is why I always say you have to look at as much work as possible, and then the experience of making is going to train your eye and hand to do it quickly. But it would have taken him his whole life, at the same time: a lifetime of experience in order to do something quickly. So that's why if people ever say to you, "How long did that take you?", the only correct answer is, "My whole life." Because if you say, "This took me an hour," it's devalued. My guess is it didn't take him an hour. But I bet it didn't take him as long as you would think. But I could be wrong. I wish we could talk to him.

OK. So, you're excited about the simplicity of Saul Bass' design work that you were able to tap into. Is that different from the way that you normally work?

ATA: I guess, up to that point, I would say so, because generally I approach my art in a different way. I usually have a lot of anxiety about starting and finishing pieces. I am a pretty bad perfectionist, and I will usually worry so much about detail and about comparing myself to others in my field in a professional or social setting, but this project in particular really helped me to discover my artistic and illustrator voice and strengths.

JMB: So what do you think your strengths are?

ATA: Playing with negative space in a way that represents my ideas in bold, graphic way.

JMB: I agree. I think that playing with negative space is one of your strengths, and if I recall, pushing you in that direction a bit, trying to get you to tap into it. I haven't had a lot of students who I have pushed in that particular direction, so it was exciting for me to see that this was a skill, that's kind of hard to develop, and Arnold looks like he wants to go in that direction, so just push and see if that can happen. So that was fun for me.

How did you approach the assignment from concept to fruition?

ATA: My story, the legend of El Silbón ("The Whistler"), was chosen for its ties to my Colombian heritage and the potential I saw in its graphic content. Despite several regional differences on how it's told, the general summary follows a selfish young man who meets a brutal end by his family as penance for the slaying of his father, ultimately being devoured by a pack of starving dogs; after which he is reborn as a tormented spirit forever carrying a sack of his father's bones, traversing the lands with a distinctive whistle that grows more distant the closer he is. The primary idea I had for my cover design was prominently utilizing the silhouette of the titular El Silbón; within his silhouette would be the moonlit farmland that served as the tale's primary setting, with the full moon simultaneously acting as a pseudo-eye; the book's title would be housed at the bottom of the silhouette. Starting with concept sketches: I think you helped a bit with this but I knew from the start I knew I wanted to go in a poster direction.

JMB: So you wanted a book cover that could double as a poster?

ATA: Yes, I seriously did want to channel mid-century graphic design, and the commercial art from that period, Milton Glaser. Keith Glaser. Pop Art. The design philosophies from the 50s, 60s, 70s, the simplicity. Soviet Art. German expressionism. I am not a fan of how graphic design has shifted in the recent years where everything looks like it's in a corporate mold. I like the stuff with unmatched personality and soul that breathes life into it.

JMB: Did you want to speak to any particular sketches?

ATA: Absolutely. From the start I had an idea of the direction. I wanted the silhouette of El Silbón.

Arnold Tatis Algarin, Concept sketches, El Silbon. Pencil. 2024. Used with permission.

JMB: It's got a kind of Hitchcock vibe to it.

ATA: Yeah, like Vertigo.

JMB: Which is also Saul Bass. But even at the beginning of the Alfred Hitchcock show, he would have his shadow. And in the original Nosferatu, with the way they used the shadow of him creeping in.



An iconic still from *Nosferatu* (1922).

ATA: Yes, absolutely.

JMB: Why are you not a graphic designer, Arnold? (Laughs)

ATA: (Laughs). Hmmm, I'm only 21! I'm thinking about it, ok?

JMB: You need to go in Milton Glaser's mold, where he trained as an illustrator, but did most of his work in that illustration/design space. That's probably your sweet spot. If you look at him as some sort of guiding light. His work is heavily illustrative. All of the people he worked with when he first started Pushpin Studios were all illustrators. And that's how they saw themselves, as illustrators who were doing design stuff.

Looking at the final sketch: You have the landscape embedded in the silhouette. With the moon as the eye.



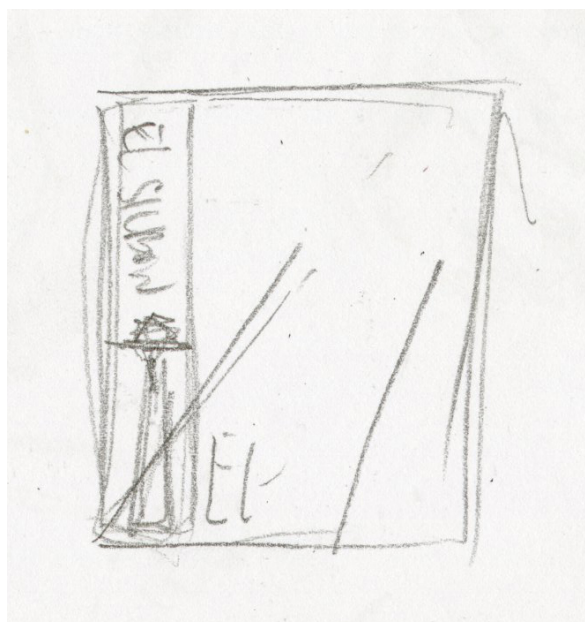
Arnold Tatis Algardin, *El Silbon* final sketch. Ink. 2024. Used with permission.

ATA: So yes, that's my final sketch after you helped me out with the composition. Can we show your sketch?

JMB: This little doodle?

ATA: Yes, with the spine and his silhouette.

JMB: So, this three lines that I drew was really helpful?



Jessica Boehman. Professor's sketch, *El Silbón*. Pencil. 2024.

ATA: Yes, because I was struggling with the composition. I knew I wanted the town and farm landscape to fit inside his silhouette, but I was really struggling with shape and format. Looking at your sketch, you helped me out with giving me a strong guideline with how to follow through with my design.

JMB: You were nearly there, I just nudged you a little bit.

ATA: I was struggling with not making it too complicated. We keep coming back to it: the hardest art to make is the most simplistic, and I didn't want my art to get too complicated. I mean, this is a book cover. It's supposed to sell the book.

JMB: So if it's not intriguing, you're not going to pick it up the book.

ATA: Complexity is not my thing.

JMB: So the KISS principle I taught you is helpful?

ATA: Keep it Simple, Stupid!

JMB: We can maybe change it to silly. Or Sweetheart.

ATA: No, to Silly!

JMB: I learned that from Mr. Weir in 9th grade Geometry class in Frederick High School; it was related to solving theorems, but I have found it's more useful in art than it is for geometry—which I rarely have to use.

ATA: So, with your input, you really helped me to get a complete idea of how I could format this before I got started inking the final. So I don't make any mistakes or mess anything up. Using ink is something you can't do right off the bat.

JMB: I think if you only work in ink, you'll get to that point eventually. So, what advice would you give to a fellow student approaching an assignment like this?

ATA: Draw on your interests in media, arts, your aesthetic in general. From my experience, some students get intimidated with projects like this, and they will overthink it. It has to be the best I can do.

JMB: You mentioned sticking to your aesthetic. Do you think there is a threat of losing your voice on these sorts of projects?

ATA: Yes!

JMB: So one of the things I tried to communicate in this class is that we're imagining that when working with clients, they have hired you because they like **YOUR** style. So I don't advocate changing styles—just finding a way to make your voice work for the project. We're not trying to get you to draw in someone else's voice. We're trying to get you to do the best you can do in your own voice, which is the challenge! But I want that voice of *yours* to come out.

ATA: Yes, that was the main challenge of the class. That and keeping the same momentum and energy going was hard. I have to give it my all, or else I'll fail.

JMB: So what did you learn, then, about the concept of professionalism?

ATA: Just don't overthink it. Just do it! I'm aware that the hardest part of the assignments is starting them. Getting stuck in sketch phase. If it's not perfect...then I'm not perfect. The advice I would give is stop thinking about all the drafts and just get working. Drafts aren't supposed to be perfect. It's just an idea, just a sketch. Put your energy into crafting the final version, and make it as "yourself" as possible. Don't worry about being the next Saul Bass or Milton Glaser. Just be the best "you." These projects are a way to improve yourself and get comfortable with yourself as an artist.

JMB: Would you change anything about this if you could go back and do it again?

ATA: In terms of changing anything specific, I wouldn't say so. But doing it over again, now that I've gotten more confident with my style, I would love to approach that project again.

JMB: So you could do a side by side comparison? It's very satisfying.

ATA: I would love to see what I could do now.

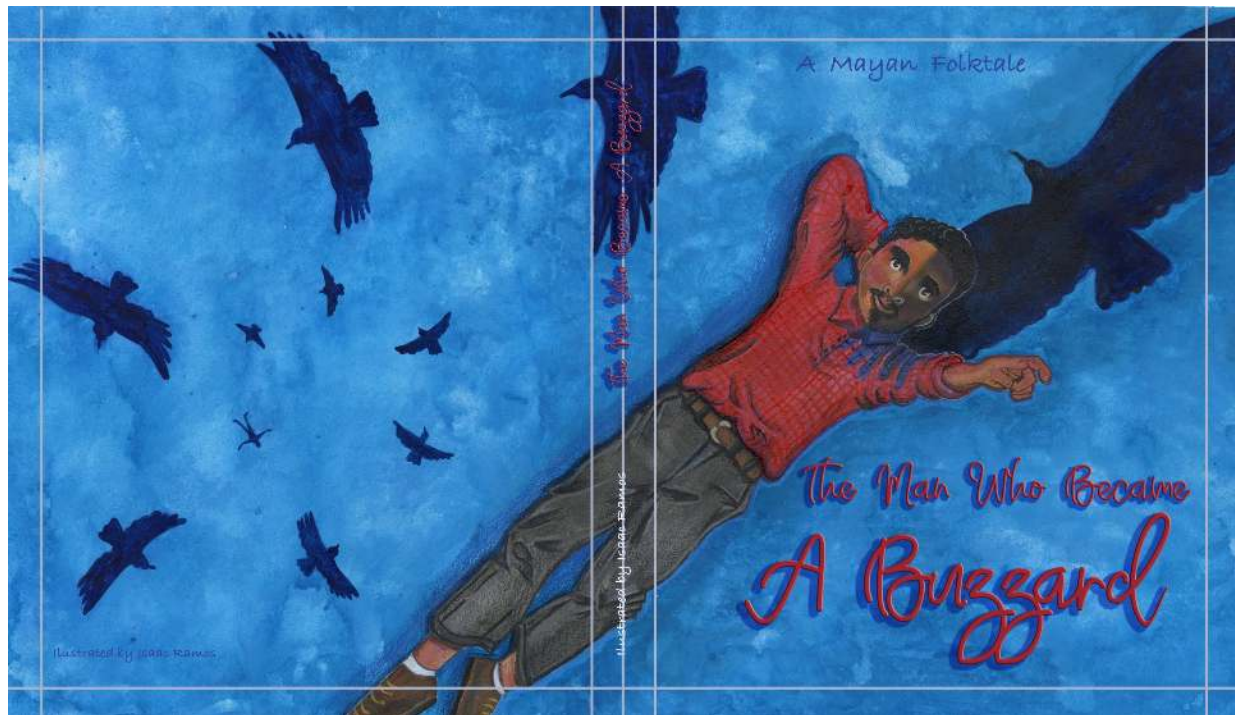
JMB: It's only been 9 months! You've grown that much in that time—that's great.

ATA: I really have gotten to make myself feel at home using ink and using analog techniques. It's crazy to think how far I've come in finding my voice in that time. I'm pretty excited to see how I'll do in the future.

JMB: Ideally, you're going to be constantly changing and improving. If you get to the point where you think you're the best, you're dead in the water. Forget it. You're done. Your interests will change, your style might change, and that's ok. You might get bored and want to try to conquer something else. It's a challenge to keep pushing yourself. It keeps it exciting, it keeps you young. Creativity is one of the great revitalizers, in some ways.

Interview with student Isaac Ramos

Read below to hear his thoughts on finding his voice in this assignment, which was inspired by the folktale *The Man Who Became a Buzzard*, but felt oddly personal...



Isaac Ramos, *The Man Who Became a Buzzard*. Watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil. 2023. Used with permission.

(JMB= Dr. Boehman, IR= Isaac Ramos)

JMB: I love this book cover. It's so nice. So this was the third assignment in a larger book project. We started with spot illustrations in black and white, then we did a full page or spread illustration, and then this was to do a front and back cover in color related to the same story that you had just illustrated. This seemed like it was one of your favorite assignments for the semester. How did you find the process of working on these narrative illustrations, and in particular, the book cover?

IR: Yeah, I think that the whole process of working on that was a really good learning experience. From the three things I did, this is the one I was most happy with. Even now, looking back, I think the three assignments don't make sense to go together in one book as the style and aesthetics changed. But yes, I definitely like it, because it was not just the challenge of doing an illustration that portrayed the essence of the book without giving too much away...I think that was one of the points that you mentioned, right...finding the balance between attracting the eye of a child looking at the book and then also not putting there anything that doesn't make sense or gives too much away about the story. I don't remember if this is something that I first came up with—or maybe you had some input on it. (Laughs). I don't remember.

JMB: True, I don't remember the exact process. I remember you sketching it out...I wish I had the sketches because I can't recall. I remember being slightly worried as you were working that this was not going to look like what I had pictured in my head. But as you continued to work on it, it came out really beautifully. I think we may have talked about composition and—I don't remember if

the bird shadow was overlapping his face at the beginning. I think there was. But, I don't know!! It may have been a collaboration between us.

What medium did you use?

IR: This is gouache, colored pencil, and some watercolor.

JMB: So you used gouache for the figure and the shadows of the birds.

IR: I did a base in watercolor, but it wasn't as saturated as I was hoping, so I covered it in gouache. And then I added the details in colored pencil.

JMB: Colored pencil takes nicely to the top of watercolor or gouache. So that's a good combination. So this particular story was about a man who wanted to be a buzzard because he was too lazy as a man. So this particular illustration, in my mind, was really nice because it is really graphic. We see the portrait of the man, the shadows of the birds, and it doesn't give away too much information. So it's very conceptual, which I think works very nicely for a book cover. It also looks like he's floating in the sky, which is nice because he wants to be bird. Instead of making the background green, the blue makes it more magical, which ties it in with the other work that you do.

IR: That collaboration aspect is one of the things I liked about your class. I don't know if I mentioned that. You really take the time to go and talk to each one of us. It's not like you are changing our minds, but you are giving us advice and that definitely helped. In the end, it's my voice, but your input—you were trying to challenge me to come to this final piece. Because like I said, I keep trying to remember where the shadow came from. I think I had it in one of my spot illustrations where I had the shadow of a man.

JMB: That might be right. I remember talking through the shadow.

IR: One of the earlier illustrations had the shadow of a man in the bathroom. So you were like, "You should go back to this concept of shadows." Because I wanted to put birds around the man to show he was lazy, and looking at the sky. One of the things is that I kind of related to the man. So I thought, what would it be like to be me, just being lazy, on the ground looking up at the sky, appreciating it from down below.

JMB: I am glad you appreciated that feedback time, because that's my favorite part of the class, too, honestly. So if there was something you could go back and change now, what would it be?

IR: Ooh, ok. For this one, I think that I wouldn't change anything. But in the whole three-project arc, it would be nice to go back and make them cohesive with the style of this cover.

JMB: Hmm. It seems to me that in the process of making these three sets of illustrations, you found your voice. This painting is closer in style to the other works you did later in class. So you kind of figured it out. It's a difficult thing when you're first getting started with illustration: trying to figure out what is your voice. So that would be interesting. What would the interior illustrations look like if you could do them in this style? You could paint them in greyscale, if that's what you feel comfortable using. This played into your talents of painting and using vibrant colors. I think that's normal. As you go forward, you have a better sense of your illustrative style, if you ever decide to use that.

IR: Ok, maybe I would change the font. The book is based on an old Mayan story. I wanted to make it more modern day, But that's not the best font I could have chosen.

JMB: Keep in mind, most of the time you won't be the one doing the font. You would do the illustration and a graphic designer would do the text. Thanks so much, Isaac!

Key Takeaways

This assignment is a hybrid of illustration and design.

- Students will have learned to work within a template
- They will have practiced hand lettering or digital lettering for legibility and drama
- They will have practiced making an illustration that is simple and eye-catching

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Graphic Narrative

In previous chapters, we have considered working for a client, types of books, and the nuts and bolts of building single illustrations. But many types of illustrated projects are sustained over a period of months as you develop an entire story, whether it be in the format of a picture book, a comic, or a graphic novel. In this section, we will discuss the particulars of a step-by-step approach to set you up for success: creative characters and environments, a tight script, storyboards to set the tone, and, of course, continuity: something we haven't had to consider very much up until this point. We will discuss illustrating for books with and without words, in color or black and white, and will talk about stylistic differences between picture books and comics and how to achieve the proper style, page design, and mood.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Next Steps- Putting Your Art into the World

- [4.1: Thinking about Artist Contracts- How to Protect Your Work](#)
- [4.2: The Illustrator's Website](#)
- [4.3: Crafting an Illustration Portfolio](#)
- [4.4: Assignment- Illustrated Postcards for Self-Promotion](#)

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4.1: Thinking about Artist Contracts- How to Protect Your Work

How to Protect Your Work

It's imperative to know how to protect your work *before* entering into any situation in which you will be paid for it. A contract is a necessary part of working with any client. Different than a copyright for a visual artwork, which must be filed with with [US Copyright Office](#) and which protects your artwork against unauthorized use, a contract rather lays out the ways in which another may pay to use or to own your work outright. Moreover, a contract signals to your client that you are a professional who is not only making sure that their work is protected, but is also protecting the client, as well. In the case of any future legal disputes, having a contract signed before the start of work will be your best legal defense against bad behavior.

I will add a sample contract below with sections that must be filled out and edited to suit your particular needs, but will discuss certain portions at the start of this section to clear up any misunderstandings.

Scope of Work Commissioned

This section defines what exactly is being commissioned from you as the illustrator. Is it an album design, a t-shirt, a single image, a self-published book?* You will want to be specific with what you will provide, from sketches to final works and the specific usage.

*When working for publishers, they will provide the contract to you. It's important that you read it carefully or have a lawyer versed in book and entertainment law read it over for you before signing. Hiring a lawyer for an hour may be well worth it if there is ever a contract dispute.

Deadlines and Completion

It will ease the mind of your client and keep you on task if you agree upon a necessary end date. Remember, the client may need a very tight deadline. Be sure to keep your end of the contract here. This should be agreed upon with the client in advance of drawing up the contract.

Rights Transferred

You need to consider what rights the client will have access to regarding your illustrations. Is it a one time use? Will they own the works outright (will they have exclusive rights? Are they licensing them? If so, what are the terms of the license? Will you be paid a royalty? Will you have the ability to retain the copyright (if you have applied for one) or other owner's rights to the works? Can you use the artwork in your portfolio, social media, or other promotional sites?

Compensation

You must have the conversation regarding compensation before filling out of a contract. Again, this might depend on the type of usage. Will you be paid a lump sum for the creation of the work and a royalty each time a work is sold? Will you have an advance that you must pay back before a royalty kicks in (most common in publishing)? Will you be paid to give the full rights away—you can never use that work again? (If so, ask for MORE). Will you retain the rights and continue to market this as other sellable media, such as t-shirts, prints, or other goods? Be sure to detail what you will be paid, when you will be paid, and how you will be paid. It's always a good idea to take a deposit upon approval of sketches. Do not deliver the final work before you receive the final payment.

Termination / Kill Fee

A kill fee protects the artist if the client changes their mind about needing the work once the work has progressed.

Non-Payment; Remedies

This portion seeks to protect the artist who has not been paid. It's a good idea, as mentioned above, to at least take a deposit at the start so you are not left with nothing at all.

Severability; Integration.

This reinforces the entirety of the contract, and suggests that it cannot be changed once signed without both client and artist agreeing (and signing a modified contract!).

Unauthorized Use by Client; Indemnity

If it is found that the client has used the artwork in ways which were not permitted, this clause means that upon legal action, the legal fees of the artist will be compensated for their expenses. This is called indemnification.

Warranty of Originality

This protects the client from you passing off a work used elsewhere as original. If they are paying for an original, give them an original.

Release of Liability

This protects the artist from being sued for damages if for some reason the work cannot be completed. This is not a license to not complete your work, but rather would be used in extreme cases.

*Note: The information at the start of this chapter was written by an artist, not a lawyer. When in doubt about contracts, seek the services of a lawyer.

A Sample Artist's Contract (EDIT EACH SECTION AS NEEDED)

ARTWORK AGREEMENT

This Agreement ("Agreement"), entered this ____Date____, between _____[Artist] and _____[Client], shall govern the respective rights of Artist and Client with respect to the artwork described herein.

I. Scope of Work Commissioned

Artist and Client expressly agree that the artwork to be created by Artist pursuant to Client's specifications shall be limited to, unless modified in a writing signed by both parties, the following artwork, hereafter known as "the Work":

(i) Sketches of possible compositions for the **(description of project)** to be completed and made subject to Client approval.

(ii) **(Description of finished work and what file specifications will be delivered)**

to be delivered to Client;

and (iii) to be used for **(describe specific use of the artwork by the Client)**

II. Deadlines and Completion

Upon receipt of Client's specifications pursuant to Section I, which Client agrees are true and complete at the time of execution of this Agreement, Artist agrees to complete the Work upon the following schedule: ____DATE____ for completion and delivery of final Work.

III. Rights Transferred. **(This is for a contract where the client purchases the rights—you can edit this to fit your needs)**

Artist and Client agree that the following rights shall be transferred from Artist to Client upon completion of the Work. Any rights not expressly specified herein shall be reserved by Artist.

All-Rights. Artist hereby grants and assigns to Client the exclusive rights to publish, print, employ, advertise, or otherwise utilize the Work exclusively in relation to the CLIENT, and not in furtherance of any other purpose not stated herein, commencing upon completion of the Work by Artist and receipt of payment by Client, unless modified by a writing signed by both parties. Artist retains ability to use the image only for his/her professional promotional use on his/her professional website or promotional print items, such as business cards, with identification of the product ownership by CLIENT, and not for reuse or resale.

IV. Compensation.

Upon completion upon the schedule set forth in Section II of this Agreement, Client agrees to compensate Artist as follows:

(Describe agreed upon price and payment schedule). Payment may be sent via (check, paypal, etc. If to paypal, list the email address associated with the account). After approval of final sketch, one change is allowed. After that, a fee of \$150 per change applies as all artwork is drawn by hand.

V. Termination/Kill Fee.

Client may terminate this Agreement at any time by sending written notice thereof to Artist at the address provided herein. Upon such termination, Client agrees to compensate Artist as follows: (1) Partial Completion. If Artist has partially completed the Work, Client agrees to compensate Artist at fifty percent (50%) of the compensation identified in Section IV herein. If this Agreement is terminated by Client after Partial Completion by Artist, Artist shall retain ownership of all rights of copyright and the original artwork, including but not limited to completed artwork, sketches, and comps. (2) Full Completion. If Artist has completed the finished artwork at the time of cancellation, Client agrees to compensate Illustrator in full as otherwise provided in this Agreement.

VI. Non-Payment; Remedies.

Any delinquent payments due Artist from Client shall bear interest at the highest applicable statutory rate in any jurisdiction in which the Agreement is made. If no such statutory rate applies, payment delinquencies shall bear interest at a rate of two and one-

half percent (2.5%) per month. Client agrees that it shall bear responsibility for any fees incurred by Artist in enforcing this Agreement, including but not limited to attorney's fees and court costs.

VII. Severability; Integration.

Client and Artist agree that this Agreement shall not be amended except by a writing executed by both parties, and expressly state that this writing shall constitute a complete expression of the entire agreement between the parties, and that no additional terms exist that are not included herein. To the extent any provision contained in this Agreement shall be found to be void, invalid, or otherwise unenforceable in any way, such invalidity shall not affect the remainder of this Agreement, which shall remain in full force and effect.

VIII. Unauthorized Use by Client; Indemnity.

Client agrees to indemnify Artist against any and all claims and expenses, including but not limited to attorney's fees and costs, incurred as a result of Client's unauthorized use of the Work under this Agreement, including the enforcement of this Agreement by Artist.

IX. Warranty of Originality.

Illustrator represents and warrants to Client that, to the best of Artist's knowledge and belief, the Work assigned by this Agreement is original and has not been previously published or licensed to any third party. This warranty shall not extend to any unauthorized or undisclosed use of the Work by Client which may infringe upon the rights of any other person. Client agrees that it shall hold Artist harmless for any claim or liability caused by Client's use of Artist's product to the extent such use infringes upon the rights of any other person.

X. Release of Liability.

Client agrees that it shall not hold Artist or any agent thereof liable for any damages arising from Artist's failure to complete the Work in a timely manner, regardless of whether such failure was caused by intentional or negligent acts or omissions of Illustrator or of any third party.

Consented and Agreed to this DATE

_____ [Client] Date
_____ [Artist] Date

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4.2: The Illustrator's Website

Tips for a Successful Artist Website

- Take the time to determine the look of your website. The pages should all follow the same theme and should read clearly and consistently. Use good photos of your art as landing pages and group your work in appropriate groups: children's, middle grade, adult; color, black and white; characters, children, and animals, and so on.
- A good way to get started is to look at illustrator websites that you consider exciting, creative, or particularly wonderful. It's a great way to get inspiration: how can you take some of their concepts and make them work for your work?
- Your work should be cohesive in style. If you have very different styles, you should group work in different sections on your site, or consider making a second site. For instance, if you do comics and realistic portraiture for which you are looking for work, it might be best to have two different sites to direct your viewers accordingly. It's ok to link from one to the other.
- You must have good quality scans or photos of your work. Make sure the color is correct, it is cleaned, cropped, and represents your work well. Your website is your representative when you cannot be there, so make sure it is showing your work at its best.
- If you like to reach out to your visitors, or you sell your art, consider having an email newsletter with an email opt-in form. This helps you have repeat viewers and customers.
- If you have written content, make sure it is properly written. Be sure to check grammar and spelling before publishing.
- Have a human presence on your site! An About Me page lets viewers know you are a real person. Tell a little about yourself and show a good headshot. Don't give away personal information, like your address.
- If you are submitting to agents, consider having scanned versions of storyboards, sample artworks, and a dummy in a password-protected section. This keeps it safe from prying eyes, protects unpublished work, but allows agents to access the page with the password you have provided them.
- Keep your website easy to navigate and well-organized.
- Choose an easy-to-read font.
- Stay away from flashing images which may be triggering for photosensitive viewers.
- Make it accessible. Think about the contrast of text on the page. Label images with alt-text for e-Readers. Make sure videos have captions. Make sure you use headers on pages with text. Make your links descriptive and not just a hyperlinked url. [Here are tips for making your site accessible to all users.](#)
- Have a clearly-labeled "Contact the Artist" page. This is better than having your email on your website, which could open you to extra spam.

Good illustrator websites for reference

See below for some excellent sites.

- [Rovina Cai](#)
- [Sophie Blackwell](#)
- [Oliver Jeffers](#)
- [Carson Ellis](#)
- [Red Nose Studio](#)
- [Shadra Strickland](#)
- [Kadir Nelson](#)

Key Takeaways

- A clear, consistent artist's website is a wonderful marketing tool that stands in for you.
- Be thoughtful about presentation of information and images.
- Remember, this is your professional, outward-facing website, so treat it as such.

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4.3: Crafting an Illustration Portfolio

PORTFOLIO PRESENTATION TIPS

Include 10-15 pieces of work that is consistent in style and voice. (Fewer than this will seem as if you are not prepared. More than this is unnecessary, repetitive, or simply overwhelming.)

Your art should look professional.

This is actually a multi-step process:

—Keep your work clean.

Clean up your image before scanning or before having it photographed. There's no need to see spills, smudges, fingerprints, or dust marks. Erase any smudges and trim any unsightly borders. After scanning or photographing, if it still needs to be cleaned up, do it in Photoshop or another photo editing program. Make sure you scan your work properly at 300dpi for print quality and save a copy under a different name at 72dpi for web purposes. Be sure to adjust for color and contrast (and that your monitor is calibrated). If you have digital details to add, like the covers of the books, do it now. If your portfolio is digital, you've got 90% of your work already done. If it's print, then follow the next step.

—Get good quality prints!

It's a bad idea to have originals in your printed portfolio, in case of theft or loss. In fact, some places, like illustration conferences, will not allow originals in the portfolio. So make a good quality print of your work that will capture the detail and color appropriately (hence the good scan tip, above). It's not worth it to skimp costs here. This is how your work will be seen by the world. I prefer giclée prints for their crispness and color quality.

—Choose a professional presentation portfolio.

Shown below is a professional portfolio. It screws open and closed to allow for additional pages, and has clear, archival sleeves with black backing, just in case the picture does not fill up the entire 8.5×11" space. It's hardcover, durable, protects my art, and looks like I care. Your portfolio doesn't have to be expensive, but should be clean and orderly and look like you are presenting yourself professionally. Sizes between 8.5×11" and 20×26", that can lie flat for tabletop presentation, are your best bet.



A hardcover portfolio

Your art should reflect your best as an artist:

—Leave out anything that shows your weaknesses.

Your work will be remembered by its weakest point. This sounds brutal, but it is true. Instead, play to your strengths. If you prefer drawing people, animals, in a cartoonish style, or are excellent at watercolors, inks, or some other medium, show that off! So:

—Choose only your best pieces.

10-15 good pieces are better than 30 mediocre images that show no real focus. Try to make sure that your work is coherent and forms a beautiful whole. Only show images that align with the type of art you would like to make in the future. Make sure that every piece is strong and shows off some aspect of what you can do, which leads us to...

—Consider subject matter

You may consider showing a mix of children, adults, animals, and even creatures.

Character studies, with a variety of pose and facial expression, are a great idea. Make sure you show some environments and different lighting or atmospheric situations if appropriate. Make sure your images tell a story—it's not a bad idea to show two or three

scenes from a single story within your portfolio to show your ability to tell a sequential story with the same characters.



Illustrations for the Portfolio—Determining the Order

—Make sure your style is consistent.

Ideally, you will have nailed down a style before looking for work. You should look for a consistency of style. After all, if you cannot have a consistent style for ten works of art, an art director may not believe you can be consistent for your entire book project. Make sure that your voice is visible in your works and all works look like they are made by the same artist.

—Try to avoid work based on photographs (and/or AI)

Not only is it tricky from a copyright point of view to make works of art based on photographs, as they are based on another's work that may be protected, but it looks like a crutch and does not show off your ability to think like an illustrator. It should be clear that work generated by AI has no place in an illustrator's portfolio, so leave it out.

—Show published work if it coincides with your future needs

If you have other work already published, this shows marketability. However, if your work is in graphic design or another related but different field, perhaps leave it out. You might have a page at the back that lists credits in a resume form.

—Know your audience and prepare your portfolio accordingly

It's important to know your audience. Trying to get graphic design work? Don't show pet portraits. Trying to get illustration work? Leave out professional design work, like logos, and stay away from images that don't tell a story, like simple portraits.

—Find the best order for your works.

Try to consider the flow of your works: grouping by theme, color, or composition are places to start.

—Get another pair of eyes to look at your work.

Speaking with illustration peers or professors is very helpful for arranging the portfolio. They will be able to see things that you will not.

—Start with and end with pieces that pop.

Why not make your best first and last impressions?

—Show both color and black and white.

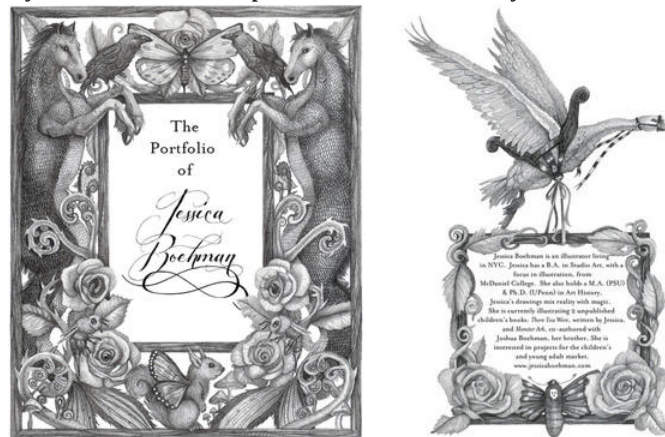
Here I really speak from experience. Last time, I had an entire black and white portfolio, and the feedback I got? People were unsure if I could handle color, if I was unwilling, or even afraid to do it. Since they could not see how I used color, they could not visualize it, and just so. Each person uses color so differently that there is no real way to visualize how one artist will execute in color. So show what you can do—in color and black & white.

Make sure you are highlighting the type of work *you* want to make.

If you have great works of art in an older style, but it's not what you want to be doing, leave it out. An art director or agent may want you for a style you do not wish to use anymore, so don't show it to them in the first place. Show off the work you love *now*.

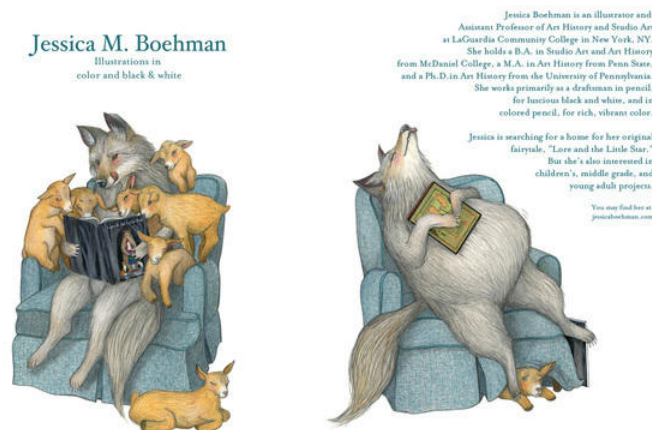
Don't forget to introduce yourself!

Include a title page at the start and a bio page as well. I believe these images should match up in theme and style to other works in the portfolio. This set is from my old black and white portfolio, which had many fanciful creatures:



Jessica Boehman, Cover and bio page for a black portfolio in a black and white, fairytale style. Pencil. 2013.

Here is another that was based in narrative, a two-part story intended for the purposes of the portfolio only. It's based on the fairytale of the *Wolf and the Seven Kids* by the Brothers Grimm.



Jessica Boehman, Cover and bio page with *Wolf and the Seven Kids*. Colored pencil and pencil. 2015. Used with permission.

If your portfolio is solely digital, make sure that your site is clean, professional, and free from any typographical errors. Bad spelling looks sloppy and sloppiness looks unprofessional. Use spell check in a word processing program if necessary and then cut and paste your copy into the website. Label your artwork with title, medium, and year of creation. Include an about me and a contact me page if you want people to be able to find you. Link to Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. if you have a social media presence.

—Attach a book dummy if you have one.

Dummies, especially for work in the children's markets, can show your ability to tell an entire story and plan a book over 32 pages.

—Have an artist's presentation card to leave behind you

This card should have at least two examples of your work, alongside your contact information and website url.

—If your portfolio is solely digital:

Make sure that your site is clean, professional, and free from any typographical errors. Bad spelling looks unprofessional. Use spell check in a word processing program if necessary and then cut and paste your copy into the website. Label your artwork with title, medium, and year of creation. Include an about me, an artist's statement, and a contact page if you want people to be able to find you. Link to Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. if you have a social media presence. (Read the chapter on making an artist's website).

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4.4: Assignment- Illustrated Postcards for Self-Promotion

Dr. Jessica Boehman; Amelia Stepnowski; Johanna Guzman; and Isaac Ramos

 Completed postcard of girl riding bike with cats, including contact info of the artist

Johanna Guzman, “Bike Ride” postcard design, final. Cut paper, watercolor, colored pencil, and digital text. 2024. Used with permission.

Johanna Guzman, Back of “Bike Ride” Postcard. Cut paper, watercolor, colored pencil, and digital text. 2024. Used with permission.

How do you best market yourself to potential clients as an illustrator? We have already discussed making an artist’s website, which you should complete before taking this next step: making hard copy promotional materials. A business card is perfect to hand out in person, while an artist postcard can be used for mailers to potential clients, art editors, book editors, etc. It’s good to have a list of people to whom you mail a card every year or so. Every artist should have one (or both) of these types of cards or know how to make one. In what way will you present yourself to the world?

Here, we will be focusing on the artist’s postcard, as it is bigger and gives more room for your images. The last of the assignments in this class—before the final project—gives the student the most flexibility to show off who they are as an artist. As this is an advertisement, a calling card for the artist, the artist must carefully consider the type of work they wish to create for potential clients and show off that sort of work. It would not be appropriate to use images here that exemplify an older style that the illustrator no longer uses, even if those illustrations are great. You want to be sure to show others the

type of work you wish to do *now*. As such, the style of your postcards should change as you develop as an artist.

The Project Specifications

- The card **must** follow the template specifications exactly—including file type, bleeds, size, and color profile—so that it will print properly. (See links below to download appropriate template)
- You will create two images for this assignment that work together to tell a story: one for the recto and one for the verso of the card. Think of it as a two-part story. After all, you are pitching yourself as an illustrator.
- You should not use existing illustrations for this assignment. You will be making something precisely for this purpose.
- Try to think outside of the “self-portrait” mode and get creative! You can show anything you wish as long as it is appropriate for a wide audience.
- You must plan space within the illustration for your text to fit naturally.
- You must include your name, website, and whichever other contact information you wish to share (a social media handle or an email if your website does not have a “contact the artist” section). Your phone number is not necessary on a business card if you do not prefer to list it.
- Prepare **three** sets of refined sketches of your front/back concepts (six sketches in total—three different compositions and solutions for the front and back of the card). I will then give feedback and choose best of three concepts.

Using a Template

You can have postcards printed from many sites, and it’s imperative that you choose this first before beginning the design process, as you must follow the particular template used by that company. For example, moo.com offers many downloadable templates.

From here, you may choose which sort of template works for you: whether you are working in the Adobe suite (InDesign, Illustrator, or Photoshop), or another program, like Procreate, you can download the appropriate file. (Download the .JPG for Procreate or other non-Adobe programs). Open the downloaded folder of files and choose which works best for your design: landscape for horizontal images, portrait for vertical images. This template will open a file that is perfectly sized, has the proper resolution, and should open a file in the proper color profile, making this process just a bit easier for the user.

You will see a list of art guidelines, which you should keep as the top layer for your design, which you will hide or delete once you are ready to print. This guideline, which includes instructions (such as preferred file type and color profile) will also give you the safety area, the trim, and the bleed. Be sure to keep all text and important visual information within the safety area, and if you want color to extend to all edges of the card, be sure to have your design extend all the way to the edge of the bleed.

Other Considerations!

Like with any illustration, the drawing you make for this is not the final output. Because postcards (and business cards, which follow the same concept but are smaller) are small in size, you may want to draw your image larger and then reduce it in size for the final card. This will keep your design looking as crisp as possible.

Consider color! Since this is meant to be handed out or mailed, you want your design to be eye-catching. It’s not a bad idea to keep the same color scheme or palette for front and back for a unified look: remember, it’s the changing narrative of the two images that will add the interest even if style and palette remain the same.

Consider style! The style should be the same on front and back or it will feel disjointed. (See the postcard by JoJo Guzman above. The design is simple, the style is the same front to back. She picked a small detail from the front to carry over to the back, tying the design together and adding whimsy while still leaving room for text for a note and for an address and stamp.)

Consider Font! Lettering is communication, and if your font or hand-lettering is hard to read, change it. Make sure it is clear and easy-to-read. Generally, you should rasterize all text on your card (or convert it to a smart object) before sending it to the printer: in this way, a rare or imported font will be legible to other computers that might not have that particular font installed. If you fail to do this, your font may be automatically transformed to some other, generic font; this could change your formatting and overall look of the card significantly. Rasterization essentially turns the text into an image, so the computer does not recognize it as something

foreign and it will print normally without glitching. You can do this by right-clicking the text layer and choosing “rasterize.” Once you do this, you cannot edit the text without retyping it, so be sure that it is correct before taking this final step.

Consider how you plan to use the card: Are you only going to hand these out in person, or have them alongside an in-person portfolio review at a conference? If so, you can have a full design on both sides. If you plan to mail the card, remember to leave room in the design for the address and any note to be visible (keep the color white or lightly colored) and leave room for a stamp. When printing your card, make sure to leave the back side uncoated so that you can write on it with a normal pen. (You can make the front glossy for best color).

Consider where you place your name. If you plan to mail the card to agents or editors, consider having your name on both sides. I heard an editor once say that if they like the art, but do not yet have room on the roster, they will hang up cards they have received. You want your name to be in their mind, no matter which side of the card they display on their board.

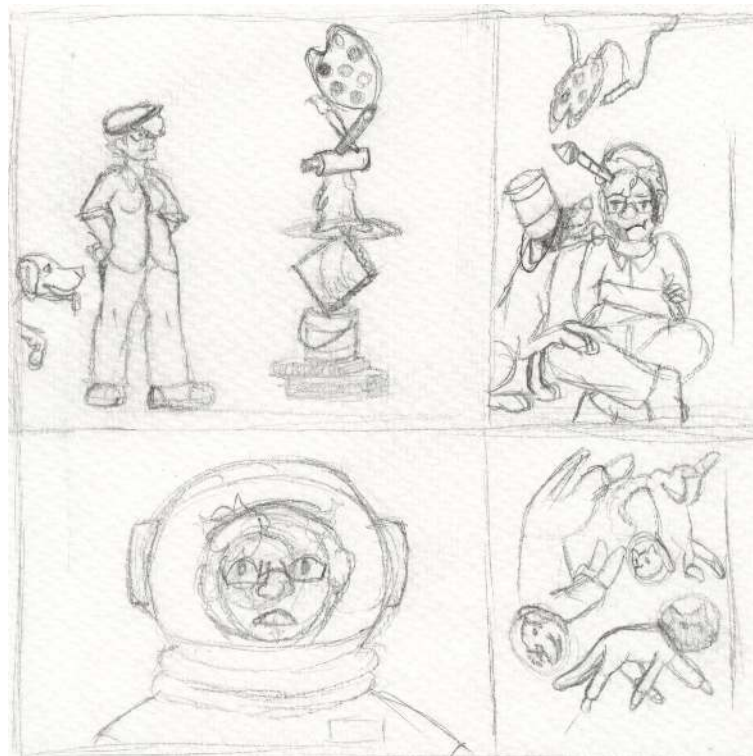
Interview with a student: Amelia Stepnowski's Read below to hear about this assignment from a student's point of view

(AS= Amelia Stepnowski, JMB= Dr. Boehman)

AS: This assignment shows off your abilities without necessarily having any guidelines, so you can really be open with what you can do. There's a lot of flexibility, so you can literally do anything that's appropriate for all viewing audiences.

JMB: So this assignment was the culmination of a semester where you had quite strict guidelines and restrictions as you worked with real and fictional clients. In the last two assignments of the semester, I opened it up so your imagination could run wild.

AS: Right, and it's interesting because even in the sketch phases, showing the professor my sketches...because of our expectations of an artist's postcard, you have free rein, you can do what you want, we kind of expected it to be a self portrait because it's showing our own artistic freedom, something we want to do. So at first, the sketches were very “me-centered,” they were all self-portraits.



Amelia Stepnowski, First round of sketches (self-portrait-style) for an artist postcard. Pencil. 2024. Used with permission.

AS: Then, I had to try to think outside of the box. In your free time, you get to do whatever you want, but in a class it's slightly different. You have these set expectations. So, I thought, “What's important to me that's not me?” I thought about stories my stories had told me about living in the country of Poland when they were kids, where people had animals. So I tried to do that, because it's

still in their behavior and therefore still reflected onto us. We are not city folk, even though I was born here, because of the way my parents raised us.

JMB: So what was your process?

AS: We had to do two-illustration story—to have the two sides connected through character or narrative. (***Professor note: this was a requirement of the assignment: make this a mini narrative illustration***). I started with the first sketch and then thought about the second half once I had my characters fleshed out.

 Sketch of anthropomorphic farmland creatures

Amelia Stepnowski, Sketch of farmland creatures for artist postcard. Pencil. 2024. Used with permission.

AS: As you see in the final, they have picnic basket, the other dances on a broken wall with a gate. They are in the country, they are going on a picnic.

 Final front of a postcard showing anthropomorphic animals in a country setting

Amelia Stepnowski, Recto of Artist's Postcard. Digital. 2024. Used with permission.

And then on the back, they are in food comas, relaxing in the shade, enjoying the day. Getting the sun shining through the leaves was hard for me to do, it's still a little off. But I think it came out pretty well, on their faces.

JMB: That is a hard think to do. There is an illustrator, [Briony May Smith](#), who has made dappled sunlight one of her calling cards. She's got it down to a science.



Amelia Stepnowski Illustrator

-email-
-phone-
-socials-

Amelia Stepnowski, Verso of Artist's Postcard (contact information redacted). Digital. 2024. Used with permission

JMB: I want you to speak to the anthropomorphic animals, fantasy creatures, that you tend to draw? It seems like you feel very comfortable making animals act as humans, and getting their expressions in ways that are believable and difficult to achieve—because it's not like you can look at a reference of a dancing, smiling pig. AS: Yeah! Honestly, I think animals are more interesting to draw as people. You mix animal and human attributes, and that creates an interesting challenge, you have to make them feel human without making them look uncanny. So you need to make it in a way that it looks like an animal that could walk and talk but not make it so weird that their legs look really weird, or their faces don't look animal enough. JMB: I feel like you have a nice balance there, because they still have the structure of the animal, yet they are standing in ways that don't feel unnatural. That's one of the real strengths of your style that I noticed over the last year.

What advice would you give to a fellow student approaching this assignment of an artist's postcard? And would you change anything now if you could go back?

AS: So no, I would not change anything. I got to work in color, and that was super fun. Advice? Just have fun: it's an open assignment, open your mind, be creative. It could turn into anything and it's whimsical in that way. You can push yourself out of your comfort zone and discover something new about yourself as an artist. Push yourself and have fun.

Interview with student Isaac Ramos

(IR= Isaac Ramos, JMB= Dr. Boehman)

JMB: Was this assignment useful, and if so, why?

IR: It was actually useful. It was really helpful. I remember the process we went through. You were always taking your time to go one-on-one with students. I remember at the beginning of the course you asked us "What do you want to work on?" and I remember that one of my goals was to work more on the backgrounds, because usually I focus more on the characters as the main subjects, but perhaps without a narrative. So I remember showing you my first sketches, and you definitely didn't like them. You were like, "These are cool, but this is not what I am looking for. They need more work."

JMB: If we can think back to those sketches, if I am remembering correctly, they were more closely based on photographs?

IR: Yes, exactly.

JMB: And so I was pushing you to go more into your own style, and I think what you came up with is really amazing. This is really beautiful. In terms of information that you think that illustrators should have, was this useful?

IR: Yes. Although I do not consider myself an illustrator—I want to be an art teacher—but it is helpful because when you go to fairs and there are people who like your work, you want a card. I had an experience where I was showing in a gallery and I didn't have a card. So I had to tell people my contact information. I didn't know what to say, haha, besides "Follow me on Instagram!" One of the things you told us, was when we give a card to a person, it's not only something they can remember easily, but is also like a gift, a small print or piece of your art. So yes, an illustrator or artist should have some sort of presentation card.

JMB: How did you approach the assignment, or what was your process?



Isaac Ramos, Recto of Artist Postcard. Watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil. 2023. Used with permission.

IR: After receiving the feedback from you that I needed to keep pushing myself, I got into my head a bit, trying to see exactly what was my voice. I think I did it a little bit directly, because the image that you see here is the street where I grew up. I was thinking about the things I told you I wanted to improve, like I said one of them was backgrounds and the other was narrative. So I had to come up with an image where I could show that I could do narrative illustration, but I can also work on having a background, and combine them together. So I started thinking about things that I did in the past, the things that I imagined as a child. For example, the image of the children riding in the wheelbarrow, is an actual memory of me and my friends when we were younger. And I wanted to add a little magic to it. I wanted it to be magical.

JMB: I think that sounds right. This Doña Toña: was this on your street?

IR: There is a store there, but Toña is my mom, her name is Antonia, so I wanted to add little Easter eggs in there. Also, in the background, there is a thing in Mexico, when there is a concert or a festival, instead of using billboards, they go to the walls and

use graffiti instead, and put the information on the wall: on this day there is going to be a party, come and join us. In this case, I put “LaGuardia” there like it is the name of a music group or something like that.

JMB: What medium did you use?

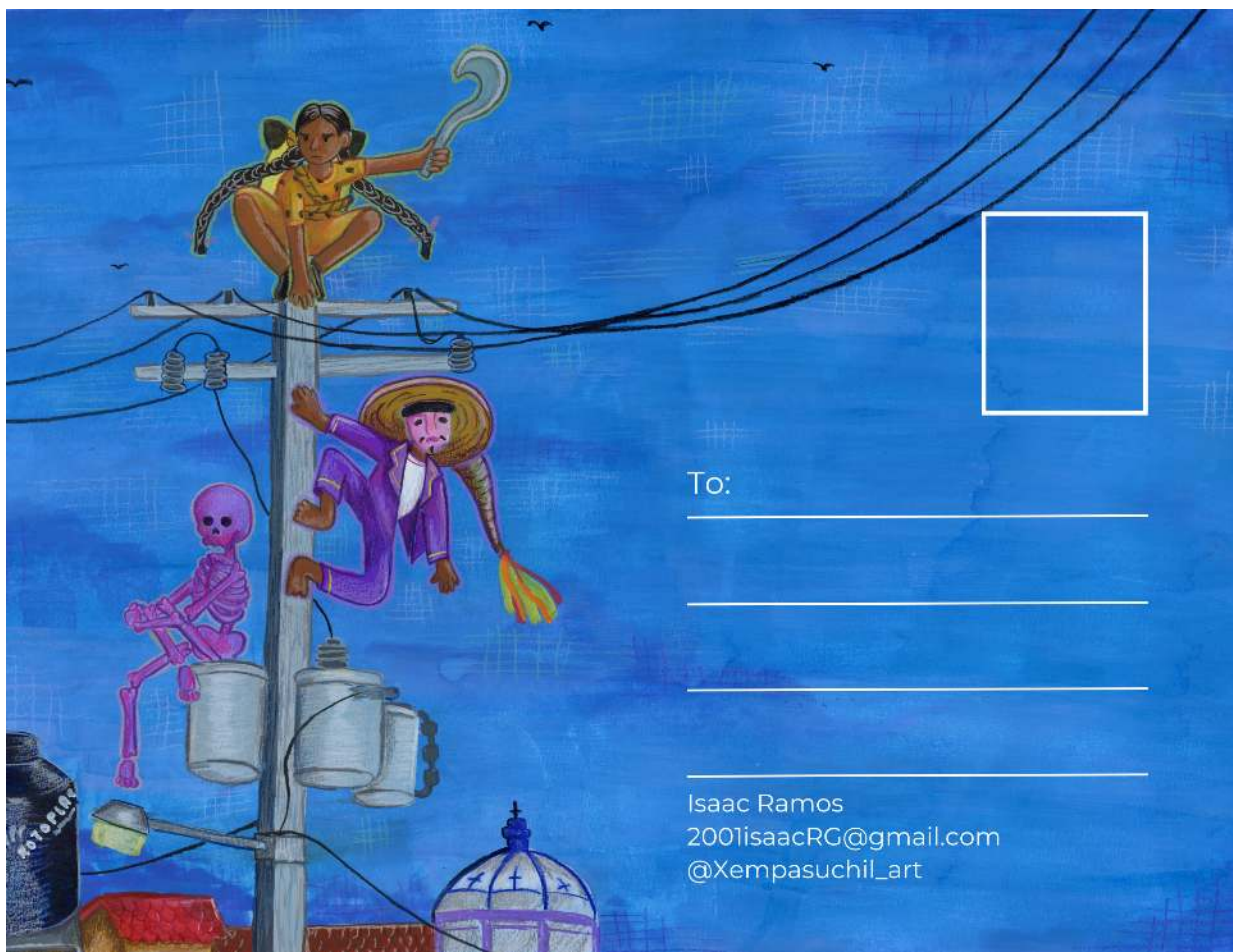
IR: Gouache, watercolor, and colored pencil, with Canva for the text.

JMB: You talked about this a little bit already, but are there other cultural references in here?

IR: It was heavily inspired by my culture, the pop culture or things that are closer to me, like the man who is in the back, sitting on the wall. That is a traditional dance from La Mixteca Poblana, the region I am from, called Tecuanes, and the dancers are called Huehues. It’s passed from generation to generation, and different towns call it different things. My town is Puebla, and we call it by those names there.

JMB: The skeleton is very common in Mexican culture, but what about the flying snake?

IR: I always used to draw these...with butterfly wings or bird wings, I guess it comes from Quetzalcoatl, a serpent deity. But I also see it as sort of an alebrije, a made up character, based on sculptures that are made of different parts of animals that are supposed to be from your dreams.



Isaac Ramos, Verso of artist postcard. Watercolor, gouache, colored pencil, and digital. 2023. Used with permission.

JMB: If there was another student—or maybe one of your own students who was going to be doing this, since you’re going to be a teacher—what advice would you give them for this assignment?

IR: I think I would tell them just as you told me, to challenge yourself. Do not see this assignment just as showing a random work of art, but one that tells people the type of art and the type of skills you can give them if they hire you. Something you are proud of, that engulfs all of the skills you have.

JMB: Is there anything you would change about this if you were to do it again?

IR: Yes, I think I would work more on some technical parts, like the shadows. I like how it looks, but I could have done better, but there was a deadline. There are always things you can change. Maybe the trees.

JMB: That's funny, I really like the trees. The setting is very evocative, like I know how it would feel to go to that place.

Key Takeaways

- The student has learned to work in precise templates for printing.
- They have considered which images best represent their unique style
- They have made a mini-narrative of two images that work to tell a two-part story for self promotion
- They have practiced using hand-lettered or digital text and layout

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Resources for Illustrators

1

Professional Societies and foundations

[The Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators](#)

This organization is a great regional and national society that helps promote the work of writers and illustrators of picture books, middle grade, and YA novels. Local meetings are a great way to meet others like you, and regional and national conferences are great places for workshops, portfolio reviews, and networking. Their annual publication, *The Book*, has up-to-date resources for publishing and pitching to agents.

[SCBWI YouTube Channel](#)

[The Author's Guild Foundation \(NYC\)](#)

Once you are published, joining this foundation will give you access to free legal advice for contracts and publishing issues.

[Children's Book Council](#)

open access books and podcasts

[Scott McCloud, *Making Comics*](#)

[Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*](#)

[Scott McCloud Podcast on 99% Invisible](#)

[Stan Lee, *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*](#)

[Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*](#)

[Edward George Lutz, *What to Draw and How to Draw It* \(1913\)](#)

[The Comics Experience Podcast](#)

Comics Resources

[Strip Panel Naked: Deconstructing the Art and Design of Comic Book Layouts](#)

[LaGuardia Comic Books and Graphic Novels](#)

[HOW TO CREATE A LEGEND \(*Dave Cockrum's designs for the X-Men*\)](#)

[The Comics Archives](#)

[The Columbia Graphic Novels Archives](#)

[VCU's Comic Arts Collection](#)

[Glossary of Comic Terms](#)

[Comics Cartography](#)

[NPR: Cartoonists Tell Us: What Do Comics Mean to You?](#)

[Gene Luen Yang, *Why Do Comics Matter?*](#)

Illustration museums

[The Norman Rockwell Museum](#)

[The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art](#)

[The Brandywine Conservancy and Museum of Art \(Brandywine River School Illustrators and the Wyeths\)](#)

[National Museum of American Illustration](#)

[The Society of Illustrators](#)

Technical resources

[How to video your art](#)

[72 Tips for Sharing your Art on Social Media](#)

Art websites that benefit illustrators

[Gurney Journey](#)—the best of the best, the site of illustrator James Gurney

[Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast \(Archive\)](#)—interviews with illustrators

[Stan Prokopenko](#) (best anatomy YouTube channel)

The business of art

[Query Manager](#)—follow your queries to agents

[Query Tracker](#)—another, easy-to-use site for tracking agent queries

[Price your Art Realistically](#)

[Should you License Your Art?](#)

[Copyright Registration Law and Your Art](#)

[Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts](#)

[Copyright Law Books \(for Purchase\)](#)

[Common Artist Legal Problems and How to Avoid Them](#)

[Artist Gallery Contracts](#)

[When to See an Arts Attorney](#)

[Artsy Shark: Business Strategies for Artists](#)

[Start an Email Marketing Campaign for your Art](#)

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10: Glossary

3

.PNG

A file format that has the ability to preserve a transparent background

aerial perspective

a visual technique that shows objects in the distance as bluer, hazier, and less distinct.

anterior

the topmost part of the plant, where the shoot system emerges to create stem, leaves, buds, flowers, and fruits

bleed

Extending the image past a trim line so that the illustration prints to the edge of a page.

chromolithograph

a color print made using the lithographic process with multiple stones or plates, each inked in a different color. Made popular in the second half of the 19th century.

CMYK

Cyan Magenta Yellow and Key (Black); a color profile often used for printing as it matches the primary colors of ink

codex

a medieval bound manuscript book, made by hand

color profile

a digital designation used for printing; generally, images can be saved in grayscale, CMYK (for printing), or RGB (for web)

copyright

a sum of money paid to a patentee for the use of a patent or to an author or composer for each copy of a book sold or for each public performance of a work.

cross-hatching

Rendering with short parallel marks, with a second layer being applied at roughly a ninety degree angle to the first layer of marks.

DPI

Dots per inch; refers to the number of dots of ink or pixels that can fit in one square inch.

end pages

decorative pages that bind the backs of the front and back cover.

ephemera

Items that are not meant to last, such as artworks on paper.

exclusive rights

Exclusive rights grant a sole and unique authority to an individual or entity, allowing them to control the use, distribution, or commercialization of a specific work, property, or asset.

fixative

a spray that helps to set easily-smearred media, like pencil, colored pencil, charcoal, or pastel

frame

a box used to define a moment in time in a sequential narrative, like a comic, graphic novel, or picture book

friable

A medium that crumbles easily and so tends to smear on your support easily, like charcoal, pencil, or chalk pastels.

Genus

type of plant, ie. Heirloom tomato

graphic narrative

A story told in pictures, with or without text.

gutter

The area where a the pages of a book are gathered in order to be bound.

hatching

A mode of drawing that uses short, roughly parallel strokes to create tone.

indemnification

compensation for harm or loss

kill fee

a pre-agreed payment made to a freelancer when a project is cancelled or not published after it has been commissioned

lateral organ

branches or shoots that grow out from the main stem

licensing

Art licensing is the process where an artist grants a third party the right to use their artwork for specific purposes, usually for reproduction on products or in other commercial contexts, in exchange for payment. It's essentially "renting" your art to a company for a defined period and set of uses, while you retain the copyright.

medium

The substance or material one uses to make a work of art (ie., paint, pencil, ink, marble)

pentimenti

The visible lines made in a drawing or painting before the final lines of the work are found. From the Italian for "repentance", signifying that the artist has changed their mind.

pitch

a summary of what a client needs in their project. Can encompass specific themes, moods, dimensions, and file types

posterior

the root system of a plant

primary colors

colors that cannot be created but exist as absolutes. In the artist's color wheel, it is red, yellow, and blue

recto

The front of a piece of a manuscript page or artwork on paper

resolution

the amount of information in a digital file per square inch.

RGB

Red/Green/Blue; the colors of light. This is a color profile used for web applications.

royalty

a sum of money paid to a patentee for the use of a patent or to an author or composer for each copy of a book sold or for each public performance of a work.

safety area

The area on a printable object where nothing will be trimmed

screen-printing

a printing technique that utilizes a mesh screen to transfer ink onto a substrate, with a stencil blocking out areas that should not be printed.

sequential narrative

A story taking place in a sequence of images: this can refer to film, illustrated books, or storyboards.

species

specific name of the type of plant, often given in a Latin designation

specifications

technical details regarding an image: color, size, font choices, bleed information, and file type are common aspects of specifications.

splash

an illustration that takes up an entire single page

spot

spot illustration

an illustration meant to work in conjunction with text on the same page. Spots can sit anywhere on the page: as chapter headers, borders, or in the right or left margins.

spread

A single illustration that covers two pages of a book. Sometimes called a double page spread.

spreads

support

paper, canvas, wood--whatever surface on which one creates a work of art

thumbnails

A small sketch that plans out composition

trim

an area added to the edge of an illustration that gives room for the printer to cut the paper to size; this is often around 1/2" of extra space around all edges of a drawing.

verso

The back of a piece of a manuscript page or artwork on paper

Detailed Licensing

Overview

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