ILLUSTRATING DIVERSITY:
STYLISTIC, PROFESSIONAL, TEXTUAL, AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICES
OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CHILDREN'S BOOK ILLUSTRATORS

By

Hà Thanh Nguyễn

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ABSTRACT

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Illustrators of children's books work in a unique profession: Their practices are at the
intersection of various, sometimes opposing, forces including their personal, artistic vision,
their professional conventions, and the social, educational functions of their books.
Involving five accomplished contemporary illustrators of children's picture books who
actively engage with diversity issues, this project explores how they navigate such a
complex landscape. Through interviews with the artists as well as analysis of their books,
their previous interviews, talks, writings, and other artifacts, I locate three areas of practice
that proved to be productive sites of negotiation and meaning making: the illustrators'
stylistic expression; their experience as picture book makers, including both industry-
specific and medium-specific practices; and their handling of diversity. Analysis reveals the
complexity of illustration work. Specifically, the artists' style is a result of material
transaction with the medium and features a tension between consistency and change. It is
both personal expression and play and a source of meanings for storytelling purposes.
Second, as applied, professional artists, the illustrators have to balance personal interests,
practical constraints, and relationships. Illustrating is a complex artistic-intellectual
engagement that depends on the fundamental practice of making to know. Third, the
participants grappled with the inadequacy of the language of diversity but were ultimately
positive. Their contribution to diversity includes both an interpersonal mode of
participation, a pedagogical mode of representation in which they deliberately and

strategically include images of diversity in their art, and an artistic mode of making as an

exercise in intuition, experimentation, and play. This study contributes to knowledge about

how picture book artists work and hopes to inspire more effective and enriching

engagement with picture books.

For Lynn

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CHAPTER 1: SKETCHING THE SCENE

Introduction

In 1965, Nancy Larrick published *The All-White World of Children's Books* in the

Saturday Review, drawing attention to the dire lack of diversity in children's books. When

surveying over 5,000 children's trade books published between 1962 and 1964, she found

that only 6.7 percent included images of one or more Black characters and less than one

percent reflected the contemporary life of Black Americans. Moreover, under-

representation was not the only problem: many of the representations were themselves

problematic. Larrick gave the example of 1946 Caldecott Medal winner, *The Rooster Crows:*

A Book of American Rhymes and Jingles, which maintained images of "Negro children with

great buniony feet, coal black skin, and bulging eyes" next to White children "nothing less

than cherubic, with dainty little bare feet or well-made shoes" (p. 65) until 1964 when the

new edition eliminated pictures of the Black children altogether.

Since Larrick's article, there have been major developments in the field of children's

book publishing. The sheer number of picture books with diverse characters has increased

(Cooperative Children's Book Center, n.d.). There is robust discussion around fair and

appropriate representations of these characters (Allen, Allen and Sigler, 1993; Ayala, 1999;

Cai, 2002; Mo & Shen, 1997). The scope of 'multicultural literature' has expanded beyond

race to include various markers such as religion, class, age, gender and disability (e.g. We

Need Diverse Books, nd). The diversity of the publishing business itself has also been called

into question (Le & Low Books, 2015, 2016).

This does not mean that the field of picture books has become less contentious;

many of the same questions and concerns remain. In early 2016, after intense criticism,

Scholastic Publishing pulled its book *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (written by Ramin Ganeshram and illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton), explaining in its statement: "without more historical background on the evils of slavery than this book for younger children can provide, the book may give a false impression of the reality of the lives of slaves" (Scholastic, 2016, para. 1). Not long before that, the book *A Fine Dessert*, a Caldecott Award contender and one of the best illustrated children's books of 2015 by the *New York Times*, was accused of whitewashing for its portrayal of a smiling enslaved woman and her daughter. The author Emily Jenkins apologized that her book, "while intended to be inclusive and truthful and hopeful, is racially insensitive" (E. Lockhart, 2015). Sophie Blackall, illustrator of the book, explained her intention in her response to NPR:

> In the illustrations the enslaved mother does not smile at all; she is somber and
> downcast when serving the white family, and tender and solicitous when alone with
> her daughter. The child smiles twice. I thought long and hard about those smiles. (...)
> I believe oppressed people throughout history have found solace and even joy in
> small moments, and this was my intent. (quoted in Donnella, 2015, para. 22-23)

Blackall's comments touch on the importance of reading in complex ways, including the tension between the author's intention and reader's interpretation. In stating that her work was "an artistic process, not a scientific one" (para. 9), Blackall spoke to the tension between the creative license usually afforded to artists and the social accountability associated with educational materials.

This case also raises interesting and challenging questions about what is shown or presented and what is seen and understood. Blackall said she felt the image had been taken

out of context and that reading pictures is ultimately a "complicated" and "subjective" experience (quoted in Donnella, 2015). Seeing is complicated, and the image of the smiling mother and daughter in this book makes sense within a very specific context: a complex network of relations to other images, ideas and practices including the concern about diversity, equity and justice in children's literature, the discussions around the 'proper' way to teach about slavery, the existing painful trope of 'happy slaves', and the influence of social media.

These contentious debates about diversity, representation, meaning making and education constitute part of the complex landscape that contemporary illustrators have to navigate. I am interested in how illustrators balance their artistic, creative vision, their professional expectations, and the social, educational aspects of their books. This project focuses on five contemporary illustrators of children's picture books who have been actively engaging with diversity issues. Through interviews with them as well as analysis of their books, their previous interviews, talks, writings and other artifacts, I located three areas of practice that proved to be productive, interesting sites of negotiation and meaning making. Specifically, in subsequent chapters I examine the following issues:

1. The illustrators' stylistic expression
2. The illustrators' experiences as picture book makers, including industry and medium-specific practices
3. The illustrators' navigation of diversity in speaking and image-making

In the next part of the chapter, to further contextualize the study, I address some important themes in illustration and picture book scholarship.

Taking Illustration Seriously

Is Illustration Art?

Illustration comes from Latin word *illustrare*, to shed light or illuminate upon, and is broadly defined as communicating a message to an audience by visual means. In the modern society, illustration is diverse and ubiquitous: it can be found in informative and educational materials (such as medical and scientific illustrations and data visualization), commentaries (such as editorial illustrations and political cartoons), persuasive messages (such as advertising), and storytelling (such as children's books, graphic novels, and illustrated adult novels). Illustration "influences the way we are informed and educated, what we buy and how we are persuaded to do things. It gives us opinion and comment. It provides us with entertainment and tells us stories" (Male, 2007, p. 19).

Despite its popularity and powerful role, illustration has not always been recognized as a respectable pursuit and a field worthy of critical attention and valuation. As an applied, commercial art, illustration has often been considered inferior to fine art and, therefore, left out of art history (Doyle, Grove & Sherman, 2018; Poynor, 2010). In reviewing a 2010 exhibition of Norman Rockwell's illustrations at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, the Independent critic Adrian Hamilton, writes:

> The original works are fascinating, the colours fresh, the paintwork rapid and fluid. Painting in oils gave him the textures, particularly of the flesh, which makes his work so warm in their realism when converted to the printed page. They also show how deeply versed he was in artistic tradition, particularly the work of the Flemish and Dutch masters, while the few watercolour sketches display a quickness of observation that makes them attractive in their own right.

Had Rockwell sold his paintings as paintings rather than illustrations he would, like Jack Vettriano, have been a highly popular artist and for similar reasons. He gives a simple, strong image that proposes a story that involves the viewer in imagining it. (para. 9-10)

Although acknowledging Rockwell's technical mastery of the medium, the review concludes with "But I can't see Rockwell ever being regarded as more than a supreme commercial artist of his time" (para. 16), and the article's title, "Norman Rockwell: An Artisan, Not an Artist", epitomizes how enduring the hierarchy between illustration and fine art remains. Rockwell himself subscribed to this hierarchy, saying: "The kind of thing I like to do, I know it isn't the highest form of art. (...) I love to tell stories in pictures. The story is the first thing and the last thing. That isn't what a fine art man goes for, but I go for it" (quoted in Bradway, 2014, para. 8).

Many illustration scholars have sought to eliminate the hierarchy but not the divide. Writings on history of the field often trace to the same roots as fine art, considering cave paintings, devotional arts and commissioned paintings of people, events, and scenes as early examples of illustration (see, for example, Doyle et al, 2018; Male, 2007). However, illustration continues to be constructed as *not* fine art. Doyle et al (2018) note that the communicative intent, rather than its subject matter, method or formal qualities, distinguishes illustration from fine art: "As artwork, illustration is often expressive, personally inspired, and beautifully crafted, but unlike art for art's sake, it is inherently in service of an idea and seeks to communicate something particular, usually to a specific audience" (p. xvii). Similarly, Alan Male calls illustration a "working art" which communicates a contextualized message to an audience and is rooted in "an objective

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need" generated by either the illustrator or a commercial client (2007, p. 1). "Unlike fine art, (...) illustration is not necessarily cultivated for its own sake and is not meant as a pandering to any intrinsic pleasures it affords the minds and emotions that might experience it" (p. 18), he writes. Communicativeness and utilitarianism provide some heuristic unity to a very diverse field.

Ultimately, "commercial art never had an essential or inherent identity any more than did fine art" (Bogart, 1995, p. 6). As Hamilton himself notes, when displayed in a museum, Rockwell's original oil illustrations are indistinguishable from traditional paintings. It is through the coalescence of various factors, including display, curation, affiliation, education, patronage... that illustration is recognized as such. Moreover, the line between the two has been constantly shifting. Michele Bogart (1990) argues that illustrators' identity as artists has always existed in tension with the ideal fine artist and is often an act of negotiation. In her research she demonstrates that American illustrators during the Golden Age, which lasted roughly from 1880 to 1930, sought to establish themselves as fine artists with vision and autonomy and many were recognized as such (for example Edwin Austin Abbey, John La Farge, and Howard Plye to name a few). However, the mass-market publishing and national advertising exerted tremendous pressure on illustrators' practices and identity. By the end of World War I, most illustrators had accepted their publishers and advertising clients, instead of museums, galleries, or art critics, as their primary patrons and "resigned themselves to the idea that their art was intimately connected to commercial concerns" (p. 270). The same tension between fine art and illustration, communication and self-expression, autonomy and accountability to editorial feedback is still felt by many contemporary illustrators.

Studying Illustration

As many illustrators and critics are educated in art history, illustrations are often studied and evaluated as art objects in the same way as gallery art (Grove, 2013). While this is still a valuable approach, Bogart (2018) argues that using the same standards means illustration can hardly measure up. It may also lead to undervaluing illustrations that do not meet the traditional expectations for paintings. There are at least two additional perspectives that can contribute to a better grounded, more comprehensive understanding of illustration: reproducibility and materiality, and process.

Illustration as reproduced material object. Different from fine arts which is typically centered around art as precious objects for display, illustration is made to be mechanically produced and distributed. This raises interesting questions about materiality of illustration and opens up a range of relevant issues for consideration such as media, reproduction technology, and display.

Walter Benjamin (1939) was concerned about the loss of authenticity and aura when artwork is mechanically produced. He argued that the original artwork has authority and a cultist and ritualistic value that comes from its embeddedness in tradition that a reproduction does not.

> It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced. (Benjamin, 1939, p. 438)

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Arguably, illustration offers a reversal of this argument: the mechanically reproduced copies are more 'authentic' than the original: The original is one step in the process and only when it is incorporated into the text that it becomes complete and only when this text gets reproduced that it fulfills its aim. In many cases, the original is even discarded after use. With reproduction comes a gain rather than a loss. Illustration art is not meant to be displayed on the museum wall without its accompanying text. In fact, "the practice of enjoying the illustration in its intended medium (a book, or album cover for instance) and at its intended scale (much illustration is painted larger than its printed size) is integral to the art form" (Grove, 2013, p. 12).

The history of illustration as a unique form of art is also a history of reproduction technology, starting with woodcut, engraving, and etching. The invention of lithography allowed images to appear in full color, but it was not until further developments in printing technology, such as half-tone screen, that more painterly illustration was possible (Salisbury, 2004). Modern photography and printing technology enable reproduction of subtle qualities in the artwork, freeing artists to choose from a wide range of artistic media. Knowledge of the different material processes, their technical capabilities and limitations helps to appreciate why an illustration takes on a certain look. Grove (2013) even suggests seeing the technical processes as part of the creative expression:

> In "slicks" —glossy magazines—often black and white artwork would have been
> embellished with spot colors, which were not painted on the artwork but instead
> specified with an overlay and applied by the printer. This, along with the fact that
> the master printer makes aesthetic decisions about the colour balance and quality of
> the ink and paper, which the illustrator (or art director) often approved after

inspecting a proof, warrants considering the printing press as an artistic medium in itself, not just a mute reproductive technology. (p. 10)

Illustration as negotiated process. Bogart (2018), drawing on parallels between illustration and public sculpture, suggests moving from seeing and evaluating illustrations as aesthetic objects to considering them as negotiated processes where the artists "grapple with tensions between their own artistic identities, ingrained through artistic training and recapitulated culture-wide—and the demands of their clients, work environments, and overall practice" (para. 13). This lens can be particularly useful to examine illustrations that can be seen as outdated or objectionable.

Many scholars and critics have taken personal/political offense at imagery that a) trades in violence and vicious racist, sexist, and class-biased stereotype b) that do the bidding of clients with corrupt or evil intentions, or c) that produced outcomes now deemed spurious or otherwise socially unacceptable. (Bogart, 2018, para. 9)

The suspicion toward illustration does not happen only with materials most often associated with manipulation such as advertising and propaganda but also with book illustration, especially children's books. It is not difficult to find illustrations that feature problematic, controversial, even offensive imagery. However, appreciating illustration does not necessarily mean condoning its subject matter, Bogart (2018) argues.

The process lens positions artists not as autonomous geniuses but as participants in communities, responsive to the social, economic, and historical conditions of their time. Under the process lens, the fact that the artist's vision is mediated by both the constraints of the text assigned to them and the collective process of development, implementation, production, and distribution should not negate its value. In fact, analyses of such processes

and how they engender forms of collective authorship may reveal a great deal about not only individual artists and circumstances but also the communities and society of which they are a part.

Understanding Children's Picture Books

Since the 1960s there has been research focusing on illustration in children's literature and picture books (Olson, 2018). As reviewed by Nikolajeva (2003), a large segment of picture book scholarship has been done either by art historians or children's literature experts. While the art historians tend to favor the visual elements at the expense of the narrative, the children's literature experts often focus on the textual elements. Scholarship that centers around the word-image relationship in picture books reached a new state of development in the 1980s thanks to the contributions of Joseph H. Schwarcz (1982), Perry Nodelman (1988), Jane Doonan (1992), and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2000) and many others. Peter Hunt calls the picture book "children's literature's one genuinely original contribution to literature in general", "a polyphonic form that embodies many codes, styles, textual devices and intertextual references, and which frequently pushes at the boundaries of convention" (Hunt, 2005, p. 128), affirming its status as a unique, innovative type of art and a productive area for inquiry.

The Picture Book Form

The picture book is sometimes referred to as a genre. However, it is perhaps more helpful to think of the picture book as a format or medium that could accommodate many of the common literary genres such as poetry, fantasy, historical fiction, detective and more. In the broadest formal definition, the picture book is defined by the use of images in tandem with words to convey meaning. Maurice Sendak (1988) traced the beginning of the

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modern picture book to the nineteenth century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott, who "devised an ingenious juxtaposition of picture and word, a counterpoint that never happened before. Words are left out – but the picture says it. Pictures are left out – but the word says it" (1988, p. 22).

Some researchers (e.g. Graham, 2014; Salisbury & Styles, 2012; Serafini, 2014) make the distinction between the picture book and the illustrated book; the latter is said to be capable of standing alone, being read and understood without the illustrations while the former must be a "cohesive unity of visual images, written narrative, and design elements" (Serafini, 2014, p. 73) and meaning emerges from the complex interplay of word and image. The compound spelling, 'picturebook', is sometimes used to highlight this symbiotic relationship (Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001).

Picture books are also distinguished from comics and graphic novels, not only in terms of target age range but also structurally. Perry Nodelman (2012), for example, emphasizes that comics is more complicated structurally due to its use of separate but connected panels organized on the page and the integration of words and speech balloons within pictures. However, in reality, there are comics-like picture books (such as Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen*, or Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman*), and comics that use one large panel on each page like picture books. In 2015, Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki's *This One Summer* (2014) was the first graphic novel to win the Caldecott Honor, an award to recognize "the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children" (ALA, nd), suggesting a blurring line between these formats among even gate-keeping institutions.

How Picture Books Work - Illustration and the Word-Image Relationship

    Word vs. image. Discussions of word-image relationships often rely on the

assumed differences between how words and images communicate. Sometimes these

differences are described in absolute terms: pictures are concrete, transparent, direct,

continuous, emotional, and multidirectional while words are abstract, coded, indirect,

fragmented, rational, and linear. In reality, not all visual images are the same. McCloud

(1994) has demonstrated that in terms of codedness and abstraction, there is a wide

spectrum between photorealist images, cartoons, and icons, with many icons being no

more transparent than the written words. Nodelman (1988) also points out that no images

are 'transparent' or uncoded: "All visual images, even the most apparently representational

ones, (...) require a knowledge of learned competencies and cultural assumptions before

they can be rightly understood" (p. 17). Moreover, words also vary in terms of directness

and words can be rendered visually in ways that evoke sensation and emotion. Hybrid texts

including picture books and comics have destabilized the dichotomy between words and

images: "word and image approach each other: words can be visually inflected, reading as

pictures, while pictures can become as abstract and symbolic as words" (Hatfield, 2009, p.

132).

    However, the relative differences between these two modes of communication are

still relevant; they form the basis to consider what information is best communicated

through what mode and how the two modes interact with each other. Nodelman (1988)

emphasizes that words are more suited to communicate temporal and causal information

while pictures spatial and descriptive information. Similarly, Graham (2014) claims that

illustration "is better suited to creating mood and atmosphere, using colour, tone, light and

dark; showing characters' clothes, faces and expressions of feeling; or representing their spatial relationship to one another and what places look like" (p. 55). Kress (2003) refers to this consideration of 'best fit' as a "specialisation of functions" (p. 154), which is partly due to the inherent affordances of the modes, and partly due to the conventions that have governed their uses. Ultimately, in picture books, words and images complement each other on the basis of their differences:

> [W]ords without pictures can be vague and incomplete, incommunicative about important visual information, and (…) pictures without words can be vague and incomplete, lacking the focus, the temporal relationships, and the internal significance so easily communicated by words. Because they communicate different kinds of information and because they work together by limiting each other's meanings, words and pictures necessarily have a combative relationship; their complementarity is a matter of opposites completing each other by virtue of their differences. As a result, the relationships between pictures and texts in picture books tend to be ironic: each speaks about matters on which the other is silent. (Nodelman, 1988, p. 221)

Word-image interaction and the 'gap'. The word-image interaction may be the most theorized aspect in picture book research. As mentioned above, Nodelman (1988) calls this interaction 'ironic'. A number of other terms and metaphors have been used to describe the tension between words and images, such as 'rhythmic syncopation', 'twice-told tale', 'contrapuntal', 'counterpoint', 'duet', 'plate tectonics', 'ecology', 'synergy', 'polysystemy', 'interanimation', emphasizing their contributive roles (see Sipe, 2012 and Nikolajeva, 2003).

An early effort at typologizing word-image relationships was offered by Schwarcz (1982, cited in Sipe, 2012). In his categorization, there are two broad groups of relationships: 'congruency' (pictures and words align with and confirm each other through either reduction, elaboration, amplification, extension, complementation or taking turn to move the story forward) and 'deviation' (pictures move away significantly from the words, such as through contradiction or counterpoint). His language seems to have influenced other scholars. For example, Doonan (1993) describes the word-image interactions using some of the same terms:

> The pictures may elaborate, amplify, extend, and complement the words. Or the
>
> pictures may appear to contradict or 'deviate' in feeling from what the words imply.
>
> A variant of this happens when the words and pictures counterpoint each other so
>
> that two separate stories run in tandem. (Doonan, 1992, p. 18)

Agosto (1999) differentiates between 'parallel storytelling', where the words and images essentially tell the same stories, and 'interdependent storytelling', where both forms are needed to understand a story. The second type of storytelling further consists of

'augmentation', where texts and images "amplify, extend, and complete the story that the other tells", and 'contradiction', where they communicate conflicting information (p. 270).

Using some similar vocabulary, Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) develop a typology consisting of five types of relationship: symmetrical (the words and pictures tell the same story), enhancing (the words and pictures extend the meaning of the other by providing additional information), complementary (when the additions are significant and produce a more complex dynamic than in an enhancing relationship), counterpointing (the words and pictures tell different stories), and contradictory (the words and pictures convey opposite information). This typology represents a spectrum from more simple to more complex dynamics.

The taxonomies above are quite similar; the differences mostly lie in the specific word choices and the level of details. Notably, inherent in these taxonomies is the notion of the 'gap': parallel storytelling or symmetrical relationship relies on redundancy or duplication, thus having fewer and smaller gaps. Other kinds of relationships, especially counterpoint and contradiction, present big gaps that supposedly make the story more interesting, engaging, and effective. Agosto (1999) describes books that use interdependent storytelling as "powerful cultivators of imaginative, creative, and critical thinking skills" (p. 277). Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) are more explicit:

> The closer words and images come to filling each other's gaps, the more passive is
>
> the reader's role since there is little left to the imagination. This is also true when
>
> there are few gaps, or if the gaps in words and images are very similar. However, as
>
> soon as words and images provide alternative information or contradict each other

in some way, we have a variety of readings and interpretations. (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, p. 232)

Kuemmerling-Meibauer's (1999) analysis of irony in picture books reveals four possible kinds of gaps: 'semantic gap', in which important missing information from the text is filled by the pictures and vice versa; gap due to contrast in artistic style, such as when a short, dull text is accompanied by humorous pictures; gap between different points of view represented by the word and picture; and gap between repetitions and changes in the sequential structure of the book. Besides word-image gaps, there are also other kinds. For example, gutters, page turns, and endpapers have been described as containing gaps. Beauvais (2015) observes that in contemporary picture book research, "gaps are both a descriptive and a normative feature of picturebooks: they both define this type of literature and are seen as guarantees of its aesthetic quality and sophistication" (para. 1).

The gap is an important notion in reader-response theory: As all texts contain gaps, it is the reader's active engagement that fills the gaps, or indeterminacies, and realizes textual meanings (Iser, 1978). Interestingly, in picture book scholarship, the gaps are also described as the domain of the artist - the result of their careful, intentional work. For example, Graham (2000) writes:

[P]icture books reach perfection when their creators are at their most disciplined. By this, I mean that the creators of perfect picture books have recognised that the two media in which they work (words and pictures) need not, and often should not, 'say' the same thing. The discipline comes in being able to let each medium do what it does best and cutting away duplication. (p. 55)

Artists also regularly talk about creating these gaps. Shaun Tan describes part of his job is to learn to trust the readers and invite their participation:

> I find that what I leave out is at least as important as what I put in. I also try to remove any details that might interfere with the universality of an idea—that is, particular references to places, people, or things, anticipating that readers will fill these 'gaps' with their own personal experience, inevitably different from my own.
>
> (Ling & Tan, 2008, p. 46)

Thus, the gap becomes a useful concept to explore the work of the artist: what kinds of space they claim or create with the text and what kinds of relationships they seek to establish with readers in the process.

Picture Books in Use

This section reviews three important themes related to the use of picture books: how the notion of age-appropriateness influences discussions about picture books, how picture books tend to be read with adults, and with what purposes.

The child in children's books. Compared to other visual-verbal materials (such as comic books) and children's media, the picture book has a more or less privileged status for its association with print literacy and many adults' reservation toward screen technology for young children. In fact, the proliferation of screen technologies has further motivated book makers to capitalize on the physicality of the books and create even more beautiful books. With picture books being works primarily aimed at young children, assumptions about what children can do, like, and need structure many of the discussions around their production, use, and evaluation.

There seems to be a persistent 'commonsense' understanding that children are different from adults and children of different age groups have differing capabilities and needs. Books for them, therefore, are expected to reflect this. In general, simpler, brighter books are supposedly for younger readers while older readers are thought to be more capable of handling visually and topically complex texts. Baby books are usually printed on resilient materials such as thick cardboard or cloth and many are shaped like toys. Publishers usually include information about recommended age range or grade level in their books, which recalls the assumptions of age-based developmental psychology. This practice is welcomed by some parents and adults who want guidance with book buying while criticized by many librarians and educators who see it as unnecessary and, in some cases, harmful as it demotivates children who read below their peers' levels and stigmatizes older children who are still interested in these texts.

Debates about controversial books tend to center around the notion of age-appropriateness. Arguments for censorship often characterize children as "impressionable and simple-minded, unable to take a balanced view of, for example, sexual or racial issues, unless the balance is explicitly stated" (Hunt, 2005, p.6). One example can be seen in the discussion surrounding Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki's *This One Summer* (2014), which won the Caldecott Honor as mentioned earlier. Listed as targeting readers 12 and above, this book fits within the Caldecott Medal's definition of children as "persons of ages up to and including fourteen" (Association for Library Service to Children, nd, para. 5). However, the vast majority of Caldecott winners and honorees had been for the younger end of the age range, typically 8 and below. *This One Summer* (2014), therefore, seems to catch some of its young and adult readers off guard. The book was the most challenged

book in American Library Association's 2016 list of Top Ten Challenged Books (American Library Association, n.d.) due to 'mature themes', among other issues and was removed from a number of school libraries (Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, n.d.). Although a children's book in a technical sense, it's not a children's book in a 'common' sense.

Many educators, researchers, and artists have pushed back against the notion of child-appropriateness. Maurice Sendak describes how he worked:

I don't write for children specifically. I certainly am not conscious of sitting down and writing a book for children. I think it would be fatal if one did. So I write books, and I hope that they are books anybody can read. (Sendak & Haviland, 1971, p. 266)

Shaun Tan (2002) expresses a similar sentiment, saying that his audience are "anyone who reads and looks. That is, anyone who is curious, who enjoys strangeness, mystery and oddity, who likes asking questions and using their imagination, and is prepared to devote time and attention accordingly" (Tan, 2001, para. 20).

Philosophical research has suggested that adults tend to underestimate children's intellectual ability. For example, Gareth Matthews (1980) argues that many children as young as three years old are capable of engaging with complex, sophisticated reasoning and childlike puzzlements correlate with imaginative, challenging philosophical questions. This ability is easy to miss and can go underground as children learn what kinds of questioning are expected of them. In children's literature scholarship, especially picture book research, many scholars are optimistic about children's ability to navigate complex textual demands, which complicates the idea of "age-appropriate." Arizpe and Styles's research (2003, 2016) on children's response to postmodern picture books indicates that children are thoughtful, enthusiastic and playful readers; they often show a high level of

observation and insightful interpretations even when limited in their ability to verbally express themselves. In fact, children are thought to be uniquely equipped, even better than adults, to appreciate picture books. Lawrence Sipe's (2008) study with first graders reading David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs* (2008) has led him to suggest "It is possible that young children are more comfortable than adults with this new definition of text as a collection of signifiers with infinite possibilities for meaning making and no fixed or stable referent" (p. 234). Children are considered the privileged readers of picture books and they may be able to teach adults how to read and to look.

The adult in children's experience with picture books. One important feature of the picture book experience is that it often occurs in a social, participatory setting. Picture books are supposed to be read by adults to the preliterate children, a case of dual address which allows for "a conjunction of interests" of the child and adult to be simultaneously satisfied (Wall, 1991, p. 35). A popular assumption is that as adults read the words, children look at the images. The reading adult can play an essential role in mediating the reading experiences either by preparing, explaining, emphasizing or censoring certain elements. For example, a study by McCabe et al (2011) found that when reading books with animal characters to their children, parents tend to label the gender-neutral character as male. Similarly, Bronson and Merryman (2009) reviewed a number of studies and reported that nonwhite parents are about three times more likely to discuss race than white parents and 75 percent of white parents never, or almost never, talk about race. In recent years, it has been pointed out that many beloved children's book classics feature racist or stereotypical elements. Encountering uncomfortable contents in their own beloved books, parents such as Marche (2002) or Bird (2014) find themselves faced with a number of

choices, either rejecting the book, editing out the offending pieces, or engaging in difficult conversations about race, racism and history with their children.

This co-participation may be factored into the design of picture books. To engage the adult reader, certain intertextual clues may be included to directly address them. Ian Falconer's *Olivia* is a typical example: its frequent references to fine art are rarely foregrounded but wait in the background for an adult, "indeed, an adult with high cultural capital" (Bullen & Nichols, 2011, p. 216), to recognize it. Platzner (2005) contrasts picture books and early readers, noting that in the former, a variety of font sizes and types can be used, and texts can be well integrated with the artwork, therefore adding to the story and the experience. On the contrary, the latter, which is more explicitly aimed at teaching children to read independently, emphasizes readability and decodability, often necessitating clear text in sans-serif font printed on a plain background. The language and imagery used in an early reader also tend to be less sophisticated.

In addition, the picture book experience could be entangled with a sense of intimacy and rituals and the interactions with the reading adult. In the home, this could "offer any family a humane counterbalance to time-clock living, a chance to pause and take a fresh look at each other" (Hearne & Stevenson, 2000, p.3). Favorite books are often read multiple times. The reading can be supplemented by various activities (drawing, discussion, craft making), providing additional opportunities for interaction.

Functions of picture books. Picture books serve at least four distinct functions: scaffolding for literacy, teaching of content, supporting emotional growth, and providing pleasure. First, picture books, characterized by visual appeals, the brevity of the text and relatively simple narrative structure, are often used as a stepping stone to higher levels of literacy, the highest of which is supposedly the ability to read long, dense texts uninterrupted by pictures. In fact, by the time students get to middle school, their reading tends to include few, if any, picture books. Struggling or reluctant readers are sometimes encouraged to read picture books to benefit from the affective-motivational effects of illustrations (Peeck, 1993) and the visual prompts which provide the imagery and knowledge necessary for text comprehension (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). In recent years, with increased interest in visual literacy, the concept of competent readers has come to imply facility with visual materials. This has led to a shift away from the text-dominated curriculum and the inclusion of various visual materials, including picture books. Children are encouraged to engage with images not only to understand the written text but also to gain fluency with the visual.

Second, as with all literature, picture books can be used to teach about various topics. Nonfiction picture books are obvious contenders for this use but fiction can also be effective. For example, books have been used to teach healthy eating habits (Randolph, 2014), encourage empathy (Palacio, 2017), or help deal with loss (Darby, 2016). Books can also send messages about gender roles (Diekman & Murnen, 2004), beauty standards (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003), or heteronormativity (Lester, 2014). In the art classroom, the picture book offers opportunities to teach young children art history (Sipe, 2001),

Third, regarding psychosocial function, picture books can help children learn about self and solve problems of childhood and become competent participants in society. This has given rise to the category of 'issue books' which address specific issues children may encounter such as making friends, understanding death and grief, managing anger… The lessons can also be subtle and unintended by the authors or illustrators as the stories model behaviors, establish consequences of actions and communicate social norms and values.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, picture books bring pleasure. The sensual pleasure emerges out of the tactile quality of the books and the visual images on the page. Sendak says "I've seen children touch books, fondle books, smell books, and it's all the reason in the world why books should be beautifully produced" (Sendak & Haviland, 1972, p. 264). Combined with the often positive, fanciful stories, picture books are a reliable source of fun. In addition, working through the relationship between words and pictures, the gaps and surprises in these books can generate delight (Doonan, 1992, Nodelman & Reimer, 2003).

Being Children's Book Illustrators

Despite increasing interest in children's picture books, there is limited scholarship

on the authors' and illustrators' perspectives beyond biographies and occasional

interviews. Like other illustrators, children's book artists work at the intersection of fine

art and commercial art; art, design, and storytelling. The medium of the book offers

particular opportunities and challenges, and working with children presents a unique set of

demands: these artists must balance the educative, entertainment and aesthetic functions

of books for young readers while also appealing to adults, including parents, teachers and

librarians, who hold the power to promote, select and purchase books. They have to

reconcile their artistic vision with a sense of responsibility toward their young audience.

Their creative activity, therefore, has an ethical element.

Recent attention to the quantity and quality of representation in children's picture

books, both classic and contemporary, adds even more stakes to the work of illustrators.

Philip Nel's (2017) research on Dr. Seuss's cartoons and books reveal a complicated picture

of an artist who actively and consciously supported an anti-racist agenda but was still

susceptible to racial caricatures. Illustrators are confronted with difficult questions: Who

can tell whose stories? What kinds of knowledge or experience are needed to inform

illustrations? How can illustrations avoid stereotypes and racist tropes? How can

illustrations tell more accurate, inclusive, sensitive stories? How can illustrations act not

only as a reflection of society but also a catalyst for a better one?

In the editorial to a special issue titled *The Illustrator as Public Intellectual,* Jaleen

Grove (2017) writes "while illustrators and cartoonists influence the course of culture, and

nobody could dispute that their work is 'public', they have rarely before been thought of as 'intellectuals'" (p. 2). She continues:

> Critical illustrators and illustrators as critics can be productive not just for illustration but for all manifestations of art, craft and media. But we will only reach this potential if illustrators claim their verbal and intellectual skills to theorize their own work and that of others; to assert views that they, as visual communicators, uniquely own; and to engage *with* publics *in* public in words as well as pictures. (Grove, 2017, p. 4)

Contemporary children's book illustrators are in a unique position to both create public work and participate in socially and theoretically relevant conversations. The work of the illustrator doesn't end with the publication of a book. In fact, school visits and book tours are often part of the job. These visits and other forms of interactions with readers not only happen right after the publication of a book but often become a regular part of an illustrator's experience. Illustrators also teach, appear in interviews, give talks and demonstrations. All of these activities extend their influence beyond their books, communicating not only about their work but also about themselves. This project, by involving socially engaged illustrators of children's books, aims to be part of those conversations.

Overview of the Chapters

This manuscript is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the context for the research and the three focal research issues: style, industry experience and illustration practices, and diversity. Chapter 2 presents key information about how the study was conducted. It opens with a statement on researcher positionality, then clarifies the

theoretical perspective, explains the process of selecting participants and offers brief sketches of the five participating artists. It also describes the procedure for data collection and data analysis. Chapter 3 reviews a few frameworks relevant to the discussion of style before describing each artist in detail. This chapter also helps to introduce the artists as unique individuals. Chapter 4 situates the illustrators' work within the publishing process and characterizes their activities in relation to the medium of the picture book. Chapter 5 discusses the language of diversity used in the publishing industry and by the participants. The second part focuses on the artists' (re)presentational strategies in relation to diversity. Finally, the conclusion offers a summary of the main insights as well as my personal reflections on the practice of (scholarly) writing and reading.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD NOTES

Approaching the Inquiry: A Statement of Research Positionality

Encountering Picture Books as an Adult

I did not experience picture books in my childhood. I was not read to as a child either. It was not atypical for those of my generation; one generation before that, most of the population wasn't even literate. This doesn't mean that no literacy practices were going on. My grandmother, who couldn't read or write, memorized an astonishing number of stories and poems, some of which are in a traditional verse form with strict rules about the number of syllables and rhyming. When not busy with housework, usually at night, she would tell my brother and me those stories at our request. By the time I could read by myself, I read whatever I found around my house. One of my first memories of reading was coming across a collection of short stories by a popular Vietnamese satirist and feeling surprised at how compelling the plain printed pages could be.

But I have always loved pictures, particularly drawn images. My textbooks in primary school had illustrations, usually simple line art in black and white and, sometimes, a third color. One exception was the series of morality textbooks, where fanciful full-color illustrations with human and animal characters meant these didactic lessons on good behaviors were the most fun to flip through.

I only encountered 'proper' children's picture books when I came to the United States. The small collection I slowly accumulated over a few years was considered by some of my friends as "notable for someone who was not teaching them or having a small child." To read and study children's picture books from a country I am not from and as an adult means to experience both pleasure and a sense of uncanniness as I frequently encounter

images, messages, ideas and practices that feel 'strange.' I have found, for example, the large number of affirmative stories about loving and accepting one's hair and skin color a very American phenomenon. I unironically get excited about beautiful books and well-told stories, and about how much could be achieved within 32-40 pages. I'm even more intrigued by the constructedness and historical/cultural specificity of the discourses and practices around picture books. This can be both an advantage and a drawback: I may be more sensitive to the unnaturalness of certain constructions, but I may miss out on subtleties and connections.

Becoming 'Diverse'

I arrived in East Lansing, Michigan in Fall 2011 and quickly learned the significance of my cultural identity. I am a Vietnamese, and that label opens up a range of connections with others: a professor talked to me about how the Vietnam war changed his life trajectory; people would tell me about their trips to Hanoi or their love for Vietnamese food. There were also less comforting connections: To embrace being Vietnamese is also to grapple with the complicated history of Vietnam as a nation state. A local church of Vietnamese Americans that organizes classes to teach Vietnamese to their children born in the US refused to have me as a teacher. A local newspaper I picked up from a Vietnamese supermarket in Grand Rapids was written in unusually phrased Vietnamese, reading to me like a strange dialect. Every year, before Global Festival, an on-campus event where international student organizations are provided with a booth to exhibit artifacts from their country of origin, there is often a hushed discussion over whether we should display our national flag, a bright red rectangle with a yellow star in the middle, and what the odds of offending a local Vietnamese American are. Sometimes, the association of Vietnamese

American students would be seated quite close by us, donning their own flag that represented the South Vietnam government before its fall. Often there was awkwardness, but rarely hostility. In our own way, we came to some understanding of the multitudes of the label 'Vietnamese'.

'Becoming' Asian came less naturally; the title felt uneasy, asking me to think about the similarities that unite a diverse group of countries whose complicated history and presence involve constant tensions and conflicts and the desire to distinguish themselves. The term 'people of color' has continued to ring foreign and even absurd. Even though colorism is no stranger to me and occasionally I'd be guessed to be Chinese (because "Vietnamese are often darker," they said), in the sheltered environment of life in a college town, racism personally felt benign, like an abstraction more than a lived environment. There are many other aspects of being 'diverse' I have not mentioned, such as in relation to gender and sexuality, disability, religion, and other ways of describing and categorizing. Despite the increasingly longer list of characteristics, thinking about diversity in purely demographic terms feels inadequate and impoverishing to me. I am sympathetic with the struggle for group-based equality and acceptance and intuitively know that it is not enough.

As I sought to reconcile these mixed feelings, I came to two general recognitions in this study. First, I understand diversity as a strategic discourse that helps to leverage aspects of group affiliations and organize actions. Second, I strive to be sensitive and respectful but often feel acutely the limitations of being on the outside looking in. Therefore, I see myself as a listener and learner; I prioritize understanding over critique, conversation over problem-solving.

Guiding Theoretical Considerations

This project is influenced by Foucault's notion of discourse. I understand it as a form of language that structures the way we can think and talk about a particular subject matter within a historical context. This may influence the way we act. It is possible to imagine children's book illustrators as being at the intersection of a number of discourses, including what it means to be an artist, what is suitable for children and/or adults, and what diversity means and looks like.

Foucault's discourse, as interpreted by Fendler (2010), has been particularly instructive for this project and for my thinking in four specific ways. First, discourse refers to anything that can be thought and put into words. Therefore, a study of discourse is open to a variety of forms, including texts, talk, images, and practices. This is relevant to the range of data used in my study and offers a common analytical frame to integrate the various data sources.

Second, discourse is connected to other discourses, and the boundary of each discourse may be strategically imposed. This inspired me to both stay open to new connections and be mindful of what to include or leave out. My identification of the three sites of practice was a result of this process. An extended, rather messy period of reading and writing had led me to other ways of grouping before the current setup proved to be most productive.

Third, discourse is dynamic and historically specific. This serves as a helpful reminder that texts, talk, images from another time and another place could be resources to make visible the contemporary assumptions and limitations. It also makes me more conscious of situating ideas, artifacts in context.

Finally, discourse enacts power relations. I strive to be attentive to how these artists negotiate or position themselves in relation to the discourses available to them as well as to my own place among these relations. As a researcher and another participant in discourse, I do not seek to truthfully represent the experience of the participants. Instead, I strive to carefully present the meanings I made from the data available to me. My interpretation is open to discussion and critique.

Selection of Research Participants

In this study, each case centers around an accomplished contemporary illustrator of children's books who has grappled with diversity issues in their work. 'Contemporary' means the artists are actively creating books, participating in the industry, and interacting with their readers. This is an important criterion because it puts the artists at the center of on-going discussions. 'Accomplished' may mean a number of different things such as professional recognition and accolades, career duration or the reach and influence of their books. The case study design allows for in-depth and contextualized study of individual artists.

To identify suitable participants, I started by examining lists of award-winning children's books and lists of recommended diversity books from the past decade. Caldecott winning and honor books are usually considered to be the most prestigious and notable; however, only a few of those books fit the common understanding of 'diverse literature'. Recommended lists of books with diverse or multicultural contents and specialized awards such as the Pura Belpré Award and the Coretta Scott King Award proved to be more productive sources.

After finding popular, interesting, or important relevant books, I looked up their illustrators and sought out indication of their commitment to diversity issues. They might have published multiple books in pursuit of such themes and/or they might have spoken or written directly about the topic. In many cases, the illustrators maintain their own website with a list of other books they have created, a portfolio of their work, updated contact information and even links to other resources. Many of them often give talks, participate in art demonstrations and interviews. These sources gave me an initial idea about their background, professional trajectory and activities, range of work, opinion about diversity, as well as artistic approaches and techniques.

I contacted the artists via email. The availability of the published books and the public nature of the participants' activities render the usual expectation of anonymity impossible. Therefore, a key criterion for participation in the study was consenting to use of identifying information, including real names, book titles, awards, and references to other materials. Some expressed interest but eventually could not participate due to incompatible schedules. Others declined, saying that they may not be the best to talk about these issues. Through a combination of chance, consideration, and mutual choosing, I managed to invite five artists for my research, Brian Pinkney, Floyd Cooper, Juana Martinez-Neal, John Parra, and Hyewon Yum. More information about them is presented in the next section.

My process was not guided by a desire for racial or demographic representativeness. By accident, all illustrators are non-white (two African American artists, two Latinx artists and one Korean American). They have wildly different techniques

for artmaking and different career trajectories, but all have found acceptance and recognition in the publishing industry.

Data Collection and Analysis

Preparing for and Conducting Interviews

Before each interview, I surveyed the books illustrated by the artists to have a sense of their art and to identify the most interesting books. I also skimmed online reviews of these books from major review websites and readers' reactions on Amazon and Goodreads to gauge the reception of their work. I studied the artists' websites for additional resources, including biographical information, accolades, sketches, writings, and previous interviews. Sometimes the artists were featured or interviewed elsewhere, and I collected those materials as well. The variety of sources helps establish a rich context befitting the complexity of the issues.

Through this process, I located the most substantial sources and incorporated them as data for the study. At the same time, I identified gaps, interesting or important ideas, which then allowed me to tailor the interviews more effectively. For example, Floyd Cooper and Brian Pinkney's videotaped art demonstration gave me a good sense of their process. This information then enabled me to discuss their specific techniques during our conversation. Juana maintains a website that goes back to her early days as illustrator, which became a rich source of data to complement the interview.

In this step I also collected images created by the participants and chose three to five images I found most interesting. These became prompts to discuss specific issues of the creative process, visual design, characterization, and personal or cultural meanings.

The interviews last between one and two hours. While the specific questions and their order varied, there were three main parts to the interview. The first part, using the notable images selected earlier as starting points, explored the specificities of their design process—what inspired a particular image, what guided the choice of colors, composition, medium and so on. This often led naturally to a broader discussion of their habitual process—how they do research, approach creating characters, or respond to different types of texts. The second part focused on the educational, social forces that influence the work of an illustrator, such as what they want their books to do or be, how they relate to their audience, and how they see themselves in relation to the publishing industry. In the final part, the participants were invited to explicitly articulate their opinions about broad ideas such as "diversity", "multiculturalism", and "cultural authority".

I interviewed John Parra face-to-face when we met in New Orleans in June, 2018. I talked to Floyd Cooper and Juana Martinez-Neal online using Skype video conferencing and Brian Pinkney via WhatsApp call. Hyewon Yum requested to answer the interview questions via email so I adapted the interview questions to facilitate written communication. All the interviews (except Hyewon's) were recorded with the agreement of the participants and then transcribed.

Collection of Other Data and Data Analysis

The texts that may be included in the analysis include the participants' published picture books, reviews of these books (from both professional reviewers and ordinary readers), previous interviews they participated in, their past talks or writings, and other artifacts. The two most prolific artists, Brian and Floyd, have published over 60 and 100 books respectively. This expansive range of possible data meant data analysis and

collection of more data was an iterative, shifting, and rather messy process, which alternated between expanding and focusing. To keep it manageable, I prioritized the interviews with the participating artists and their books as primary data and used themes and insights from them to inform subsequent reading. Five specific, related practices were helpful for my engagement with data:

Close looking/reading meant taking time and looking at the data carefully. It was through careful, attentive reading that rigor was established. This was facilitated by engaging in explicit, sustained conversation with the data through notetaking and memo-ing, constantly asking what I was seeing and what might be influencing such seeing.

Contextualizing involved being immersed in the broad discussions related to the topic. I read children's picture books, followed illustrators, agents, and editors on social media, and subscribed to book review platforms and picture book and illustration-focused blogs and podcasts to gain familiarity with the language, participants, concerns and practices in the American publishing industry.

Inductive coding involved careful, repeated engagement with data and drawing out codes grounded in data. Many codes did not lead to insights, but others connected at varying levels of abstraction and added layers to the analysis.

Juxtaposition. Putting images and statements side by side on the same surface can often inspire surprising connections.

Intertextuality refers to "the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts" (Rose, 2012, p. 191). The more immersed I was in the data and the context, the more intertextual links I could make. This formed the basis for my analysis.

Delimitations

This project is not an ethnographic study of artists' work. There were no direct observations of their studio practices (although there were recorded demonstrations of some of their techniques). A lot can be learned from observing artists directly and attending to moments, behaviors, or relationships that are unintentional, easy to miss, or difficult to express in words, but this is not such a study. I also did not aim to build a comprehensive biography of each artist or focus on the sociological forces that influence their work.

Instead, I considered the way the artists talk about themselves, their activities, and their books and how such talk and the imageries they create help construct and characterize their work. This discursive approach allows discussion of deliberate, more or less stable, and meaningful artists' activities. In addition, my own reading and experiences with the images also constitute the data. This comes with a number of limitations.

First, artistic work involves intuition, experimentation, play and other factors that cannot be easily described or explained with words. The mysteries of the creative impulse and artistic process, which are also acknowledged and recognized by the artists, are beyond the scope of this study.

Second, while the findings from this project allude to the forces and workings in the publishing industry, it is ultimately a project about five individual artists. It does not aim to make generalizations about the field as a whole.

Thirdly, engaging with images is a complex, sensorial, and personal process, and my reading of them is both incomplete and provisional, constantly in a state of being revised.

<h3 style="text-align:center">The Five Participating Artists</h3>

Brian Pinkney

Brian Pinkney was born in Boston in 1961. The son of Caldecott medal winning illustrator Jerry Pinkney and acclaimed children's book author Gloria Jean Pinkney, he was always surrounded by art. He has said about his childhood:

> When we were growing up and went to museums or dance concerts or things like that, we always came home and made pictures. It was a family activity. We'd pull out the paper, and we'd all start drawing. It got to the point that it was just natural for me to draw. My mother would find me in the corner drawing and would say, 'Wow, that's beautiful. Go show your father.' And he was in his studio, which was in the house, so that's when I got to see his world. (quoted in Bishop, 1996, para. 5)

After a childhood of many creative pursuits and encouragements, Brian attended the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and earned his Bachelor of Fine Art. He later received a master's degree in illustration from the School of Visual Arts in New York. During his graduate studies, he started experimenting and perfecting his scratchboard technique, which involves scratching lines onto an illustration board coated with black ink before adding colors. After over ten years and a lot of critical acclaim with this medium, he later switched to using watercolor and developed a second signature look for his art. This change has profound implications for both his creative process and the look of his art and will be explored in more detail in a later section.

Brian has published over 60 books and won numerous awards, including two Caldecott Honors, four Coretta Scott King Honors, and a Coretta Scott King Award. He has also written and illustrated his own books, including *Max Found Two Sticks* (1994)*; The*

Adventures of Sparrowboy (1997), a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award winner; *Cosmo and the Robot* (2000); *Puppy Truck* (2019). He frequently collaborates with his wife, author Andrea Davis Pinkney—the 'picture book perfect' couple have published over 20 children's books together. Some notable examples of their collaboration include *Alvin Ailey* (1995); *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra* (2006); *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* (2010); *Martin & Mahalia: His Words, Her Song* (2013); and *Martin Rising: Requiem for a King* (2018). They are living in Brooklyn, New York with their two children.

Floyd Cooper

Floyd Cooper grew up in Bixby, Oklahoma. During his childhood, his family moved frequently. He attended eleven elementary schools in North Tulsa, and art was how he quickly made friends at a new place. His teachers noticed his talent and encouraged him to keep drawing. He later earned a scholarship to study fine arts at the University of Oklahoma.

After graduating, Floyd worked as a revamp artist for Greeting Card Design at Hallmark Cards in Kansas City. His job was to take rejected art and changed it into something more interesting and sellable. In 1984 he moved to New York to pursue more opportunities and worked various precarious jobs to make ends meet. His becoming a children's book illustrator was a combination of chance and tenacity. After his first book, *Grandpa's Face* by Eloise Greenfield, was published and recognized, he gradually established himself as a children's book illustrator. Since then, Floyd has worked with bestselling authors including Jane Yolen, Nikki Grimes, and Virginia Fleming, and illustrated over 100 books, many of which he also wrote and the majority of which feature Black characters. He has won numerous awards, including the 2009 Coretta Scott King Award for

The Blacker the Berry, three Coretta Scott King Honors, 10 ALA Notables, two NAACP Image Award nominations, NJ Center for the Book Inaugural Award, Jane Addams Peace Award Honor and many others. Floyd lives in Easton, Pennsylvania with his growing family.

Juana Martinez-Neal

Juana Martinez-Neal was born in Lima, the capital of Peru, to a family of artists. Her grandfather was an oil painter and her father a watercolor artist. She attended the School of Fine Arts at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

Moving to the U.S. in her early 20s, Juana had worked in graphic and web designs for 10 years before deciding to become a children's book illustrator. She tried for many years to enter the industry, but it was not until she won the SCBWI illustration mentorship in 2011 and the prestigious SCBWI Portfolio Grand Prize in 2012 that she started to gain more recognition. In 2014, Juana received her first contract from a trade publisher for *La Madre Goose* (Putnam), written by Susan Middleton Elya. It was published in 2016. Her second book, *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) by the same writer, won a number of important awards, including the 2018 Pura Belpré Medal Award for Illustration. Her other books have also been very well-received.

In 2018, her debut picture book as an author-illustrator, *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (Candlewick Press) was released. It received both the 2019 Caldecott Honor and the 2019 Ezra Jack Keats Award Writer Honor. Her second book as an author-illustrator is coming out in 2021.

Juana makes her home in Scottsdale, Arizona, with her husband and three children.

John Parra

John Parra is best known for his children's books featuring Latinx culture and his distinctive folk-art style. I met John in New Orleans on a sunny morning in June 2018, the day before he received a Pura Belpré Honor for his book *Frida Kahlo and her Animalitos* (2017). As we sat on a bench under a big magnolia tree in Jackson Square with a good view of the St. Louis Cathedral, surrounded by tourists and occasionally interrupted by traffic noises and, at one point, the train, he talked about how fitting it was that his one of his most recent books, *Marvelous Cornelius* (2015), was set in New Orleans and he had painted this church numerous times for his book.

John grew up in Santa Barbara, California. After graduating from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, John worked as a commercial illustrator for years before getting asked to do his first children's book. Since then, he has published twelve books and won various awards, including the Pura Belpré Honors, the Christopher's Award, and the Golden Kite Awards from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. John also illustrated a series of six USPS Forever Stamps titled Delicioso, which celebrates Latinx cuisine.

Although most of his early books are related to aspects of Latinx culture, John's recent books have expanded into other topics while maintaining the signature visual language. *Marvelous Cornelius* (2015), for example, tells the story of an African American sanitary worker in New Orleans. *Hey, Wall* (2018) is about a community coming together to make their neighborhood more beautiful.

John lives in Queens, New York with his wife Maria.

Hyewon Yum

Hyewon Yum was born in South Korea and grew up in a loving family that she considers 'picture book perfect'. As a child, she loved reading, particularly fairy tales and Jean-Jacques Sempé's books, and got sent to art class as an intervention against her finger-biting habit. Hyewon studied fine art and printmaking in Korea but her interest in books and storytelling led her to picture books. She has shared in a previous interview:

> I didn't really know much about picture books and great authors like John
>
> Burningham and Maurice Sendak until I became an adult. I fell in love with them. Of
>
> course, I wanted to tell my own stories. I found out picture books are the perfect
>
> medium for me: I can tell your stories with pictures. Every page can bring you to
>
> wonderful, fantastic and magical worlds. (Yeom, 2019, p. 2)

Determined to become an illustrator, she came to New York and received her Master of Fine Art from the School of Visual Arts. Her thesis project became her first published book, *Last Night* (2008), and won the Golden Kite Award and a Fiction Honorable Mention for the Bologna Ragazzi Award. In a starred review, Publishers Weekly wrote of her debut:

> In stunning linoleum block prints, debut artist Yum imagines a little girl who dreams
>
> of a night in the forest with her teddy bear. (...) Some picture books are written for
>
> children; this one gives a sense of what it's like to be one. (2008, para. 1)

Hyewon's second book, *There Are No Scary Wolves* (2010) won the Founders Award from the Society of Illustrators. In total, she has published nine picture books as author-illustrator, including *The Twins' Blanket* (2011), a Junior Library Guild selection; and *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten!* (2012), which won the 2013 Ezra Jack Keats New

Illustrator Award and was selected as a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of the Year. Her books as an illustrator have been well-received as well.

Hyewon shared that family is a constant theme in her work, and almost all of her family members have been featured. One of her first published books, *The Twins' Blankets* (2011), was inspired by her own relationship with her twin sister. *Puddle* (2016) came from her experience drawing to entertain her son, and *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten!* (2012) is about her own anxiety when her son started going to school. Her experience growing up in Korea and becoming an immigrant also has a profound impact on her work.

Hyewon lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and two sons.

CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTING ONESELF VISUALLY—ILLUSTRATORS' STYLES

This chapter focuses on style as a meaningful site to explore how artists construct themselves visually. The first section develops some language to describe illustration styles. The second section, drawing on both my own experience with their art, interviews with the artists, and other materials, explores each artist's style in detail. The chapter ends with a discussion on the development and meaning of illustration styles.

Describing Illustration Styles

Styles as Broad Categories of Artistic Expression

One common way to describe illustration style comes from the field of visual arts where identifying the style category of a work of art is a common practice and part of interpreting and appreciating it. Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson and Short (2011) list seven broad categories of artistic styles in picture books, five of which come from recognized movements in Western art (realistic, impressionistic, expressionistic, abstract, surrealistic) and two additional ones (folk art and cartoon art). Matulka (2008) discusses nine styles, including the seven above as well as naive art and romanticism. Below is a brief explanation for each style following Matulka (2008).

Realism shows people and objects with details and accuracy as they appear in real life. The most realistic art may look like a photograph.

Expressionism is concerned with conveying emotions and relies on exaggeration or distortion of lines, shapes, or expression for effect.

Romanticism is not common in picture books but is sometimes used to emphasize "the opulent atmosphere around the subject in a bold, dramatic manner" (Matulka, 2008, p. 81).

Surrealism is recognizable through the use of imaginative, provocative, or strange details.

Abstract art refers to images that depart from literal, figurative representation of people or objects in order to capture the essence of concepts, ideas, emotions, or things. Abstract art draws attention to "intrinsic form and surface quality" (Matulka, 2008, p. 78).

Cartoon art also does not aim at realistic depiction and relies on simplified forms and shapes. Images can take on distinctive qualities like silly, goofy, or loveable.

Naive art is characterized by its childlike, flat, two-dimensional quality. There is usually little detail and deviation from accurate anatomy.

Folk art often looks similar to naive art but is also connected to a sense of place and traditions or practices of a certain community.

Notably, these are broad *general styles* and an artist's work rarely fits neatly into one single category. Rather, "facets of these styles may be merged into the artist's personal expression of the world" (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson & Short, 2011, p. 83). General styles provide a set of tools, conventions, or ingredients that the artist could choose from, use, and combine as they see fit.

Styles as Variations on Levels of Abstraction

Focusing on only the different degrees of abstraction in how characters are depicted, Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2014) identify three broad styles: minimalist, generic and naturalistic. The minimalist style renders human characters in simplified shapes and forms, for example a circle for the head, two dots or small circles for eyes. This style may also show the human figure in limited head and body angles (such as only front and side views) and often does not attempt to maintain accurate proportions. Expression of

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emotion tends to be schematic. In contrast, the generic style tends to be more detailed, and therefore, capable of showing more expressive faces. Finally, the naturalistic style is "the most subtle, restrained and nuanced of all and the expressions are to be read much more as those of real people" (p. 32). Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2014) argue that these different levels of abstraction are directly related to how emotion is communicated and how readers can relate to the character: The minimalist style positions readers to be relatively detached observers; the generic style enables "an empathetic stance, where common humanity is recognized and the reader stands in the character's shoes", and the naturalistic style allows readers to "engage with the characters as individuals rather than as types" (p. 33).

Another interesting way to describe abstraction is advanced by Scott McCloud (1994) in *Understanding Comics*. In his theory, if we put a photorealistic image of a face at one end of the spectrum and a simplified cartoon consisting of two dots for the eyes, a line for the mouth and a circle for the head at the other end, between them is a range of possible iterations progressing toward the 'idea' of a face. This progression is called *iconic abstraction*. The ultimate iconic abstraction, where meaning remains but no more resemblance exists, is language. Therefore, pictures and words are on the same spectrum rather than separate domains. There is also non-iconic abstraction where "no attempt is made to cling to resemblance or meaning, the type of art which often prompts the question "What does it mean?" earning the reply "It 'means' what it is!"" (p. 50). This kind of abstraction results in marks on the page that are not connected to an external, observable reality. It also completes the triangle that unifies different kinds of marks on the page.
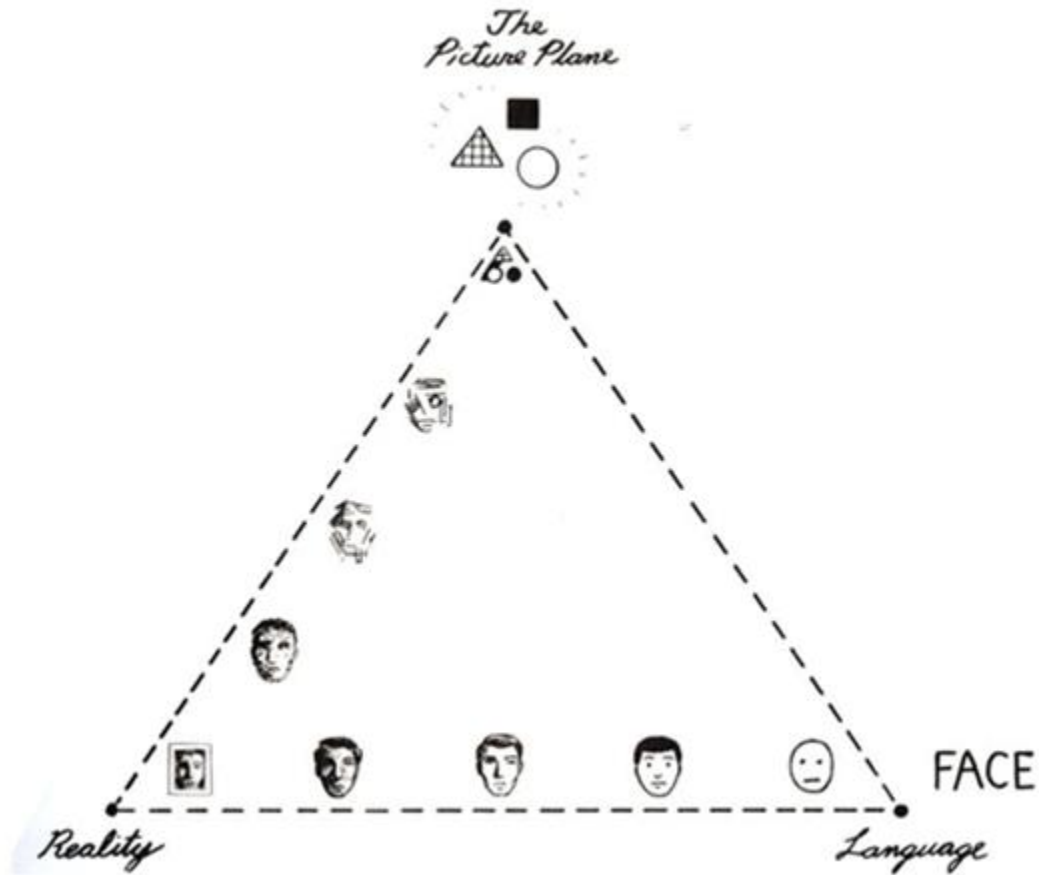
Figure 1: McCloud's triangle of iconic and non-iconic abstraction (McCloud, 1994, p. 51).

According to McCloud, the more realistic image of a face can be described as
'objective' because it indicates the face of a real, recognizable other. In this aspect, McCloud
agrees with Painter, Martin, and Unsworth's (2014) theory explained above. However,
McCloud argues that the cartoon face is 'subjective' because it functions as a blank canvas
on which readers can project whatever features they want, usually themselves. Therefore,
the mode of engagement here is not emotional distance as detached observers but the
opposite: it enables roleplaying and blurs the line between self and the other.

I do not seek to establish general rules that connect the form of abstraction and the
type of readerly engagement but find McCloud's triangle a useful tool to analyze

(re)presentation techniques and make comparisons across artists and across different books they have made.

Styles as Coalescence of Salient Features of the Artwork

Nodelman (1988) broadly defines style as "all the aspects of a work of art considered together" (p. 77), including color, line, shape, texture, artistic medium, common motifs, and themes. Description of styles, therefore, involves identifying and articulating patterns of salient features that help distinguish one artist' work from another's. Some artists can be said to have a more distinctive and consistent style than others. Artists may also be characterized by the variety of styles they have performed in different texts.

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Five Artists and Their Styles

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In this section, I try to identify and articulate salient features that can be seen across the body of published books by each artist. In describing artistic styles, after noting my initial impression, I consider more systematically features like style category, abstraction, medium, color palette, motif, type of story, and variations among different books. I also integrate the artists' narratives where they describe their process, the origin and development of their techniques, and the personal or practical significance of a detail or a technique.

Brian Pinkney's Intuitive, Gestural Movement

      From scratchboard to watercolor. Over his 30-year career, Brian has illustrated a wide range of stories, from folk tales and fairy tales to poetry, biographies, nonfiction, and fiction. Most of these stories feature African American characters, both historical and fictional.

      During the first part of his career, Brian consistently used a scratchboard technique, something he developed during his master's program at New York's School of Visual Art. Instead of drawing or painting directly on canvas or paper, he covers a white board in black ink then uses sharp tools to scratch into the board, removing the black paint and revealing the white layer underneath. Brian describes the process as resembling engraving or woodcut, after which color is rubbed into the scratched areas. When oil paint is used, it is possible to go back and scratch the surface again, repeating these steps to build up layers. The result is a surface with depth and a textured, sculptural quality. The thousands of white lines to form the image lend it a sense of movement. The colors are often bold and saturated.

      From the early 2000s, Brian started an entirely different way of painting and, as a result, created a different kind of image. The third image in Figure 2 from his book *On the Ball* (2015) about a young boy playing football is a good example of this new look. A few gestural marks help define the boy's shape, and the impressionistic areas of soft color are never fully enclosed by the black outlines. There is a clear sense of movement and spontaneity. This stands in stark contrast with his earlier disciplined and sculptural look.

Figure 2: Some of Brian Pinkney's characters from *Max Found Two Sticks* (1994), *Pretty Brown Face* (1997) and *On the Ball* (2015). Images used with permission from the artist.

Explaining this shift, Brian recalled a Tai Chi-inspired art workshop that he happened to attend "just for the fun of it". The workshop included calligraphy instruction, working with a sword, and creating a giant painting for the final project. "I went into that and I thought, Oh this is so fresh and the exact opposite of the laborsome process I was doing," he said. At the same time, something in his work environment had just changed. His wife started working in Boston several days a week, and he was at home with a young daughter and son, trying to balance parenting and work. With young children around, he could not work on something like the scratchboard, but he still wanted to make art.

> I was kind of a stay-at-home dad but I really wasn't because my studio was at home, so I was the working dad with the baby. (...) So I would just take a paint brush and do a quick painting of my son. I ended up doing a series of angels that are all based on him (...). I could actually paint these angels in about 15 minutes, which was about how much free time I had. And I realized this is a way that I wanted to work on books.

Notably, his shift to the new medium and new way of working cannot be attributed to external factors alone. The third reason, and possibly the most significant, is that this new way of creating allows him to experience art differently. He explained:

There was another part of my spirit that wasn't being fulfilled with this scratchboard (...). When I work with a scratchboard, I could be watching *The Sopranos* on HBO—I'm just scratching away thousands of these little lines, which was so laborsome. When I'm working with watercolor now, it's immediate, it's fresh, I can't have any of the distraction.

He has stayed with this technique even after his children have grown up and he could resume working independently in his studio.

Intuitive movement and critical evaluation, fast and slow. Since his first book using watercolor in this new way published in 2003, Brian has worked on more books in a similar manner and his technique has evolved. His art demonstration with *The New York Times* Books highlighted some of the current techniques.

Here Brian uses gouache but as a transparent material similar to watercolor. Gouache is thicker and more pastel, resulting in a more vibrant look. He paints in big gestures and moves quickly in a manner resembling calligraphy. This necessitates painting at a larger scale, often twice the size of the book, because a smaller size would not allow the same level of movement and energy. Using paints mixed with water, he can move the color around and play with it when the board is still wet. The process is highly intuitive and relies on an immediate sense of how colors work together.

Figure 3: Brian Pinkney's art demonstration. Screenshot from video with *The New York Times Books*, recorded live on Facebook on Jan 11, 2018.

He uses the metaphor of dancing to describe his process: "Once I start a movement, I want to finish it". As he waits for the first layer to dry, he thinks about what is already on the page and what to add for the next layers, thus balancing between fast working and slow looking, between intuition and contemplation. He also makes space for reflection and critique by painting one image multiple times, separating making and looking back and involving other people in the act of looking:

> The first time I do these angels in this fresh style with my son, I couldn't tell which
>
> ones were successful, which one worked. I actually took them to my father, and I
>
> had done maybe a hundred, and he pulled out about 20. He said "These ones are
>
> really special". And I still didn't know what he saw in that. It probably took me years
>
> looking at them to see.

To Brian, intuitive painting comes with a price: doubt. He talked about his experience of working on the book *On the Ball* (2015):

I was working on it for years before I showed it to a publisher. (...) And I did a final

dummy book, sketches, very fresh. I showed them to Kevin [his editor Kevin Lewis

with *Simon and Schuster*] and he said "Look, these are the finishes". He said "You're

already done. You've been painting this little boy kicking a soccer ball for so long,

you know how to do it. If you go back and try to finish it, you're going to ruin it,

you're going to add too much." So literally they printed the images that I thought

were the sketches (...). Because even though I liked the freshness of it, I didn't have

enough confidence to say that when I do something fresh it's going to work because

it's almost coming too much from my ego, like "Oh I'm going to do this now, it's

going to work."

Therefore, as part of his artistic process, he has also had to learn to trust that his

knowledge and experience is working 'behind the scenes', and if he makes a lot of images,

"likely something is going to work".

Floyd Cooper's Human-Centric Theatrical Realism

Process matters - Floyd's oil erasure technique. Before I talked to Floyd Cooper

for the first time over Skype, I watched a video of the 2004 National Book Festival where he

demonstrated his oil erasure technique. He had designed the official poster for the same

event.

Floyd starts by introducing his favorite object—a stretchy eraser—and an

illustration board covered with a thin layer of brown oil paint. He presses the eraser on the

board: as it removes some of the paint where it touches and leaves behind a lighter area, a

shape is formed. He continues to make another shape, then another, pausing after each

move. It was not clear from the beginning what is going to happen, and the audience,

myself included, watch on as gradually, a human face emerges. He erases some more, and the image is clear and unmistakable, the illusion complete. He speaks of this practice as an act of starting, then looking and responding: "a shape will make you realize other shapes that were not there at the beginning". One shape leads to another. One shape leads to seeing another shape that was not there before. As it is mainly concerned with light and shape (rather than line), this method allows image making even when the artist cannot draw well.

Figure 4: A demonstration of Floyd Cooper's oil erasure technique. Images courtesy of the artist.

This unique process of image making constitutes his artistic 'voice'. He wrote about it recently:

> From the very beginning of my career in publishing, I have strived to be different, distinctive and unique in the approach and finish to my art. I have utilized a signature technique, exclusive to me and unlike anything or anyone else's style of producing imagery for books. We will call it here the "subtractive process". The medium we will call "oil erasure". I guess you can tell that I am proud of the fact that I have carved a special place for myself in the children's book world when it comes

to artistic medium and expression. My own signature "voice" as it were! (Cooper,

2018, para. 11)

He learned the technique in the context of freelance commercial work where

assignments had to be completed quickly. It enables fast establishment of tone, after which

colors, sometimes transparent washes, other times opaque, are added on top. Originally

using gouache, he later switched to oil paint. He has also experimented with other

materials to layer colors, but the basic steps remain the same. Floyd has demonstrated it

numerous times and used it for all of over 100 of his books. When asked if he has ever

wanted to try something else, he has said:

I do, and I have attempted to do that a number of times, but there are constructs in

place that help to hold you in place. People who buy the art—they want the comfort,

I guess, of knowing what they're going to get, so they tend to want what they've seen

you do, as opposed to taking a chance and trying something new. But I am

expanding on my own. I've been experimenting with a lot of different media.

Hopefully I'll be in the position to just be able to produce that someday, and not

have any other issues at hand like paying bills. (quoted in Stutton, 2015, para. 49)

This sentiment touches on the tension between the artist's desire to change and the

external pressure to stay consistent, recognizable, and predictable. In his actual work there

have been incremental differences, such as the different accent colors, the looser, more

impressionistic look in *Miss Crandall's School for Young Ladies & Little Misses of Color*

(2007) thanks to the use of melted chalk, or the dreamy rendering of the landscape in *Max

and the Tagalong Moon* (2013)*.*
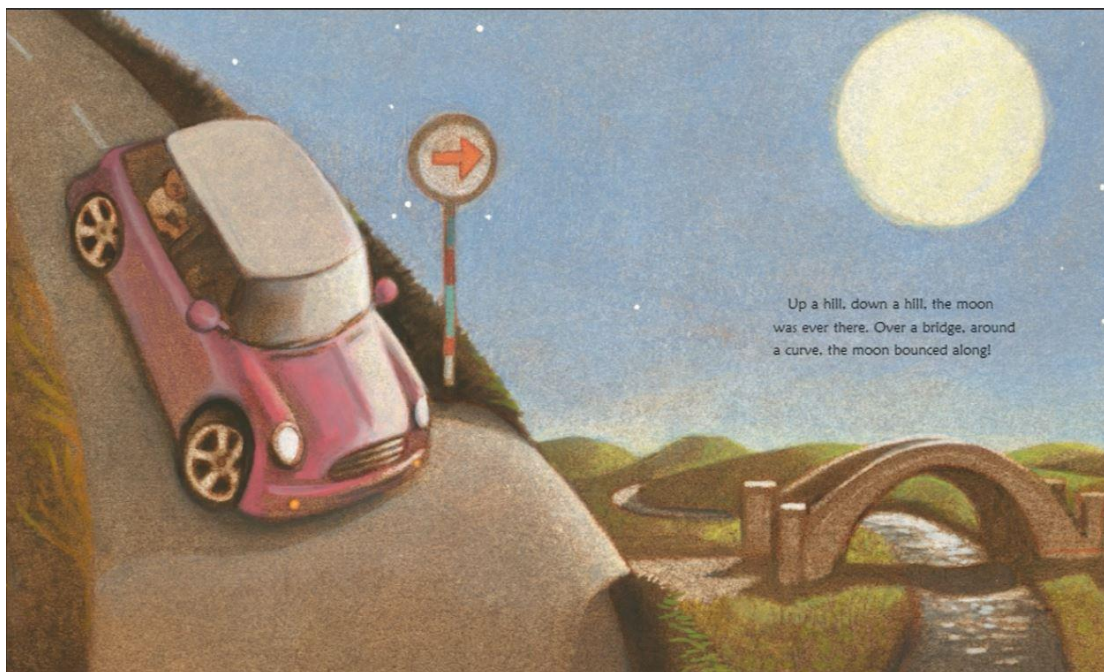
Figure 5: A spread from *Max and the Tag Along Moon* (2013)*,* written and illustrated by Floyd Cooper. Image courtesy of the artist.

Human-centric theatrical realism. Most of Floyd Cooper's books are historical nonfiction, which matches the vintage look of his art. His characters, the majority of which are African American, are often portrayed tenderly. Floyd's art can be described as human-centric theatrical realism based on three observations.

First, his images are realistic looking, almost like a photograph, with soft edges and warm earth-tone colors. The lighting is used to great effect, and together with composition, creates a sense of cinematic drama.

Second, Floyd pays a lot of attention to characterization and the human face. Close-ups are frequently used; the faces are expressive and emotional. The close distance positions readers to gaze and linger upon another person's face and creates a strong sense of intimacy. Floyd makes extensive use of real models for his painting. For example, the girl in *A Dance Like Starlight* (2014) was modeled after an actual girl, the daughter of his wife's

colleague. He had to plan, think, and act as both director and photographer to capture the expression needed so he could later transfer it into his painting. Emphasizing emotional connection is how he expresses his interest in humanity. In the example below, Ben's upturned face is the attentional center of the scene. His expression stands in stark contrast with the crowd around him.
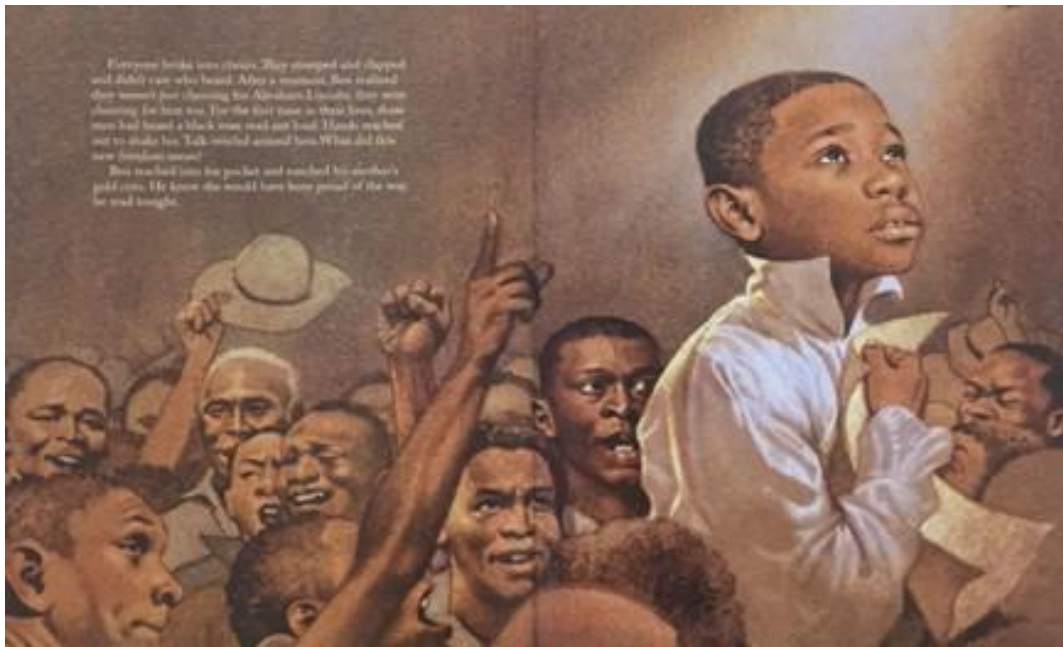
Figure 6: A spread from *Ben and the Emancipation Proclamation* illustrated by Floyd Cooper. Image courtesy of the artist.

Third, Floyd has talked about resisting being perfectly photorealistic. This is achieved by applying colors in a more impressionistic manner or by intentionally leaving details unfinished and the lines or the grainy quality of the material show through. "It's looseness that comes from a place of structure," he said. Imperfections that gesture at the material work of the human hand bring to the work a warm human quality as opposed to a cold, mechanic look.

John Parra's Culturally Meaningful Art

John's busy, colorful, textured art. John's art has a distinct, recognizable signature look that has stayed strikingly consistent across his published books, so consistent that it is possible to imagine the children in a number of his books as a recurring set of characters. Sometimes called 'outsider art' and more often called folk art style, his visual world is characterized by vibrant, flat colors, simplified shapes and forms that give the scenes a flattened look; human characters often have oblong heads and sharp-angled limbs. The folk-art look is described by some as naive art, suggestive of similarity with child art and those without formal training. It feels accessible. Combined with his use of vibrant, warm colors, his books often feel comforting. Stylization applies not only to body form but also in expression: most characters bear a cheerful and peaceful look. In sad or intense situations, they may wear a gentle frown. This enables a sense of emotional distance and allows space for readers to process the emotion. Motifs like the stars, the sun and animals are also heavily stylized. Decorative elements such as various symbols, vines, and other patterns, sometimes adorn the page.

The stylized look of folk art may make characters across his books seem similar. With that, the color and sense of place in his books become salient as a distinguishing characteristic. John has talked about choosing and tailoring a specific color palette for each book. For example, *Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos* (2017) features Frida's distinctive *azul* color while *Hey, Wall: A Story of Art and Community* (2018) is dominated by a soft, peaceful teal.
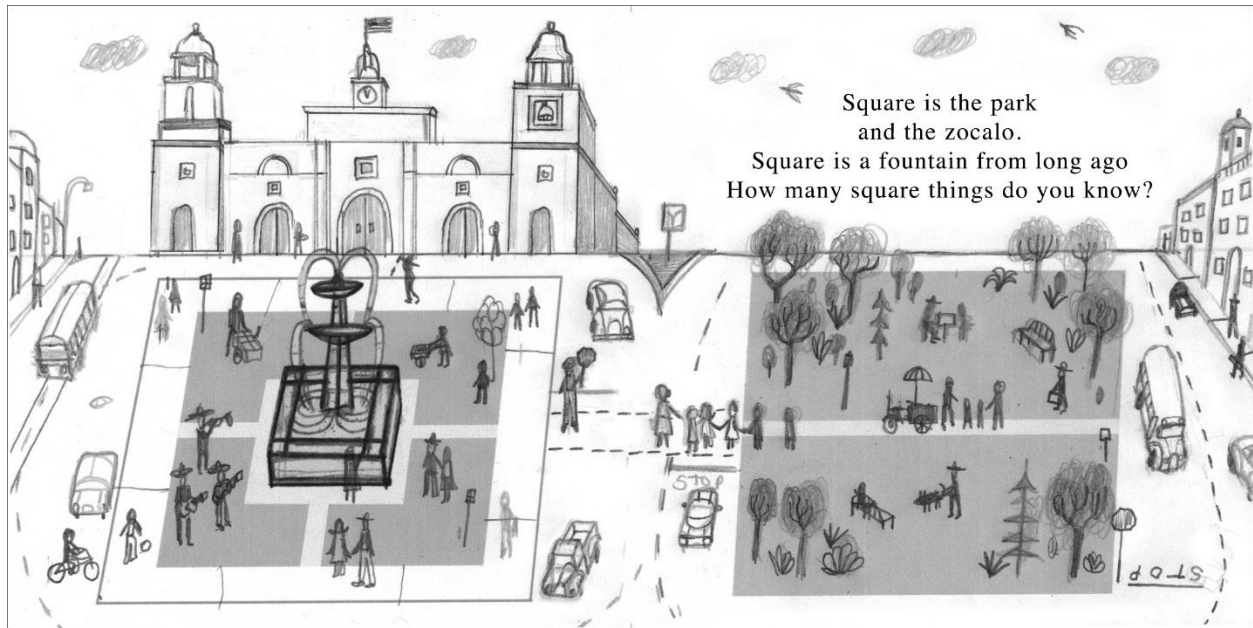
Figure 7: The sketch of the square and fountain scene by John Parra for *Round Is a Tortilla* (2013). Image courtesy of the artist.

John's settings are often rich and full of details. His picture plane is typically populated with many people, things and activities going on at the same time, which rewards close-looking. For example, the square scene from *Round Is a Tortilla* (2013) above invites readers to look slowly and closely at the many types of vehicles, people, activities, objects, and animals. Similarly, the street of New Orleans during the parade in *Marvelous Cornelius* (2015) is crowded with not only people of different colors, shapes, and clothing, but also ants and birds and the stars. He compares this to the diorama one might find at a natural museum, and this metaphor is a helpful lens to look at his pictures.

My mom took me to the natural history museum as a kid and I love those dioramas. There are all sorts of other things happening at the same time, so it's almost like, it's just full of life. I don't know. I want to breathe, I want to have life and I don't want it

to be like, "Here's your character, that's all that's happening. That's it!" No, look at this, there's so many things going on at the same time as we sit here.

His setting is also where he could hide various kinds of 'Easter eggs', such as himself as a child, or a recurring red umbrella in many pages from *Marvelous Cornelius* (2015)*.*

Finally, the textured look is another characteristic of John's art. His work involves an intensely material process using illustration boards with a textured surface that resembles painting on wood. He paints layers of color acrylic paint onto a board, then sandpapers to give it a worn, old-fashioned look as if it has been sitting out for years. That forms the background foundation. The sketch is then transferred to the board, not by painting directly on it but by the meticulous process of masking out shapes and adding paint over the masked area. The clean outlines of his figures are the result of this process. He then adds shading and details to complete the work. Acrylic dries quickly and is more forgiving than other media like watercolor or oils, so adjustments and corrections are possible. Sometimes final touch-ups are done in photoshop. Looking closely at the surface of the page, readers could see the wood-like grains and the scratches that reveal layers of colors beneath.

Style as connection to cultural roots and personal pleasure. The way John talked about his style suggests an interwoven creative and existential process to arrive at a look and a process that feels 'true'. Having done art all his life and gone to art school, he had learned many techniques and processes including how to paint realistically before settling on the naive, folk art commonly associated with children and those without formal training. It was his final year of art school, and "something was missing, I couldn't quite feel connected," he said. A Mexican Chicano fine artist, Salomón Huerta, who used to attend his art school came back to give a lecture.

> He talked about his family and his background. And I just really connected to him and his work, his philosophy, his ideas, his thoughts about working in art and what it meant to him. I stayed after the lecture and we had a conversation outside the auditorium. And it just made sense to me that's what I wanted to do. I was thinking "What's important to me?". Family is really important to me, and those memories of growing up is really important to me.
>
> So the very next project I worked on was a Day of the Dead sort of series. And I had so much fun doing it. It was like I got to start all over again and it was done in a folk arts sort of way, 'cause Day of the Dead is often seen in that sort of way. I built this whole series after that, and I just, I didn't want to stop. (...) Up until then it was like, it got mechanical; it wasn't fun anymore, you know. And then it just, bam, that was it. It became fun all over again.
>
> His art style, therefore, is both how he connects to his cultural roots and the

permission to be playful and have fun. He spoke of his strong ties to his childhood in California and his background:

When I started with my career, I always knew I wanted to do something related to, even though I branched out into other areas, but in my core, I really wanted to come from my background.

John enjoys having a consistent style where he could "change it yet still keep that sort of signature style intact that people would recognize". Changes over time mostly happen on the technical side, such as how to do the sketches, transfer, and paint.

Folk art as both culturally specific and universal. Although influenced by Mexican folk art and starting out with Latinx-themed stories, John has expanded to other types of books. He sees folk art as a versatile style that could accommodate all kinds of stories: "it could be serious, it could be funny, it could be tragic". Folk art can be found all around the world, and with that, it has not been difficult for him to adapt it to another context.

There is also a self-selection factor as he enjoys biographies, tall tales, and folk heroes, which resonates with folk art. Six out of his twelve published books are biographies. *Marvelous Cornelius* (2015), for example, is a story about a charismatic sanitation worker in New Orleans who did his job as a performer and brought the community together. *Little Libraries Big Heroes* (2019) is about Todd Bol and how his grassroot effort led to a movement and brought communities together through books.

Juana Martinez-Neal's Soft, Cozy World

Juana's soft, cozy, intimate art. Compared with other artists in the study, Juana started out much later: her first trade book, a book of nursery rhymes, was published in 2016. This does not equal a lack of experience or insights. She has a clear vision for her work:

> I know that in my work what I want to do is I want people to feel. That's my goal. You open a book, and you feel, you have strong emotions, either you're in love, or you're deeply sad, or strongly moved. That's my goal.

Juana's book world is warm, soft, cozy, and intimate. Her color palettes vary: *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) is colorful and dominated by a specific shade of red; *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (2018), her debut as author-illustrator and a semi-autobiographical story, has a limited palette of pink, blue and gray, resembling the feel of an old photo album; *Babymoon* (2019) features rich, warm shades of brown. What unites her art across these books is the soft and cozy aesthetic with rounded, cute characters in loving environments. There are no harsh lines and colors are carefully blended to create depth.

Juana expressed a love for character-driven stories. A motif that can be seen in a number of her books is the incorporation of animals as side characters, all infused with mood and personality. She spoke of illustrating *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017):

> First I had the character and then I thought oh we need a cat so I added the cat that would be a fun character to follow through that story. But then when I added the guinea pigs, it brought a whole other layer of these really funny little things, like micro-stories within the story. I just think the way I approach my work is, I do

things to keep myself entertained. I think if I keep myself entertained, I will keep the children entertained.

Incremental changes and pursuing freshness. Juana described herself as a mixed media artist. She has used acrylics, handmade textured papers, colored pencils, graphite, and other materials in her work. All of her published books make extensive use of color pencils, but she said it was not necessarily some inherent qualities of this medium that first attracted her. As a painter, she used to paint with oils and brushes. Her choice of colored pencils as the main medium, however, was due to the unique situation she was in: Her husband went to school for illustration and had a box of art supplies, and she had young children at home:

> So I've found this box of art supplies, and he had lots of colored pencils, I mean a lot of colored pencils. And my children were very young, and I was afraid that if they were to chew on the colored pencils it was still safe while if they were to eat my oils it would be very, very dangerous! So that's how I started to use colored pencils.

Safety concerns for her children led to her starting out with colored pencils but she has also experimented and incorporated other media in her art. Each book usually takes her about four months to do sketches and another four months for painting. Each book becomes an opportunity to try something slightly different:

> I started exploring acrylics. I added wire and paper and fabric. Honestly, I was just seeing what would stick, I was just experimenting. Then one thing will work and then I will keep that. I keep testing new things and then another one will work, and I will keep that, and I keep experimenting. That's basically how I work. I find my paper, I find a way to do texture, I find a way to apply the color, and then apply

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different media, one on top of the other. Because my work is about layers. So it's all experimenting and I always try to at least change one thing in that mix so I can always keep myself entertained. It's not just keeping myself entertained, but it's keeping myself feeling challenged. That's what it is. Keep something interesting by having something to figure out. That's what keeps me going.

Hyewon Yum's Versatile and Expressive Cartoon

Hyewon's vibrant and emotionally expressive world. Most of Hyewon's books feature rosy-cheeked characters and a bright, summery palette. She often leaves visible the darker line that contours her figures; colored areas are often patterned rather than smooth, showing the quality of the art media, whether watercolor or colored pencil. Most characters are portrayed in a minimalist, expressive cartoon style where both facial expressions and body poses reveal their feelings. Compared with Juana's style, Hyewon's characters are more textured, sometimes less finished, and show a wider range of subtle emotion.

Hyewon has published as author-illustrator more than as illustrator alone: nine of the fifteen titles shown above were written by herself. Family is a constant theme in her work. So are experiences from her own life. Many address more difficult emotions such as anger and regret (in *Last Night*), fear (in *There Are No Scary Wolves*), jealousy and sibling rivalry (in *The Twins' Blanket and The Twins' Little Sister*), and anxiety over new experiences (in *Saturday is Swimming Day* and *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten*). There is economy in her use of language: brief, direct dialogues rather than narration move the story forward.

Her books frequently feature multicultural families and diverse crowds. She said about the power of pictures: "I think the visual image is very powerful, if we see more of multicultural images in the picture books, we might take them more easily and naturally."

Versatility. Looking across Hyewon's art, it is easy to notice the versatility of her work. First is her use of medium. Her first book, *Last Night* (2008), was created through linoleum block printing. She liked the color and texture, but it is hard to show details with this medium. Some, such as *This Is Our Home*, mostly used watercolor. Her other works often feature a combination of prints, colored pencil, watercolor, gouache, or other media. She explained, "I don't have a favorite medium, I like to try different medium. When I have a story, I try to figure out what medium is the best for the story."

Second, the impression of versatility comes from her facility with a wide range of storytelling tools. Hyewon moves comfortably between showing a rich, detailed background in one book and using expansive white space in another. Characters' expressions may be exaggerated. Even their sizes and colors can be manipulated to indicate their emotional state. Layout also varies greatly from one book to another.

Figure 8: Art by Hyewon Yum for *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten!* (2012). Image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 9: Art by Hyewon Yum for *A Piece of Home* (2016). Image courtesy of the artist.

Making Sense of Illustrators' Styles

Style as Meaning, Style as Personal Expression

Nodelman (1988) argues that with picture books, the emphasis on style as individual expression may be both "misplaced" and "inappropriate" (p. 78). Instead, style should be analyzed only in relation to how it contributes to meaning, such as how it facilitates a particular interpretation of the story. Under this functional, rather than personal, understanding of style, even consistently unique features in an illustrator's art should be analyzed in relation to their narrative power. He gives an example of considering Sendak's visual language:

> [T]hat which is quirky in Sendak—the large feet of all his children, the peculiar combination of seriousness and comedy in almost all his work—functions primarily as a source of information, a way of specifying the particular tone and flavor of stories as he wishes us to understand them (p. 80).

Nodelman elaborates on the two assumptions for this argument: First, the illustrator's art should be informed by the intended narrative effect rather than personal preferences or impulses. Second, the illustrator needs to respond to and match the tone and style already established by the writer:

> [T]he very essence of the work of illustrators demands that they most often work to communicate the styles of people other than themselves—the distinct qualities of the authors of the texts they illustrate as expressed in those texts. Illustrators are subsidiary artists, their work a parasite on work that already exists. (Nodelman, 1988, p. 79)

Interpreting illustrations in terms of how they serve the narrative is certainly a legitimate stance. However, by overemphasizing meaningfulness and intentionality and foregrounding the style of the text, this argument underappreciates the power of the illustrator and how chance, accident, idiosyncrasy, and playfulness may feature in their work.

As the artists in this study demonstrate, there is remarkable flexibility in how one 'style' can accommodate a range of stories. Brian's fluid and gestural, sometimes almost abstract, watercolor art has worked with both poetry and narrative, both fiction and nonfiction. John's vibrant, cheerful colors and folk-art style are most often associated with happy storytelling, but it does not feel out of place in his illustration of the contemplative poem *The Captive*. In addition, illustrators can carve out considerable space of their own from the text, sometimes transforming it in significant ways. Juana's treatment of *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) turns it from a generic princess story into a culturally specific one. The humor and tenderness in many of Hyeon's books mostly come across in her art, especially when juxtaposed with the sparse language. As such, illustrating does not necessarily mean faithfully translating a pre-existing style of "people other than themselves" into visual means but re-interpreting the text and creating a visual world for the story. Finally, a purely functional reading cannot account for the acts of play and idiosyncrasy. As described above, the artists' choice of art media could be accidental rather than rational and calculated. John's hiding images of himself (and refusing to identify them) as a background character or incorporating his own memories of a place does not necessarily contribute narrative meaning to the story. Rather, those acts represent a way

that the artist has fun with the text and open up a channel for them to speak and connect directly with their audience.

Style as Material Transaction with the Medium

"Some elements of style, both individual and general, seem determined by the materials and techniques available," writes Ross (2005, p. 237). She discusses an act-centered account of style, in which we take into consideration both "the contribution of different tools and raw materials" and "the acts and gestures, the intentions and skills, with which the tools are wielded, the materials altered" (p. 237). It is possible, then, to think of style not in the finished object but "in the artistic acts that created that work" (Ross, 2005, p. 237).

As analyzed above, illustrators' work lends itself relatively easily to this view, especially as the artists have developed signature methods in their art making.

Stylistic Consistency and Stylistic Change

There are many possible paths to how a style develops. Salisbury (2004) argues against actively and consciously pursuing a 'style'. Rather, "[T]the process of working honestly, and with a passion for your subject matter, will allow your work to evolve and develop its own identity" (p. 21-22).

The participating artists demonstrate varying degrees of consistency in their visual language. While John Parra and Floyd Cooper are highly consistent in their approach to and techniques of image making, there are more variations in Juana's and Hyewon's books. Brian's two distinct phases have little resemblance with each other, but within each phase, his art appears recognizably consistent. Their stylistic development can be seen as the way they engage with the tension between consistency and experimentation. This tension lies at

the intersection of a personal desire to be innovative and responsive to the text; the pull and pleasure of habit, established process and personal sensibility; professional constraints and expectation; and the events and encounters in life.

First, changes and variations may be motivated by specific demands of a text. Biographies, for example, demand a degree of 'accuracy' whether in character design or settings while poetry may ask for a personal interpretation. Therefore, illustrators may develop different approaches and techniques to address the needs of different texts.

Second, all of the artists talked about seeking freshness, challenge and pleasure in their work, and experimentation seems to be a particularly enriching aspect of artistic work. John Parra, for example, an artist with a high degree of stylistic consistency, takes pride in his signature look: "I like that you could change it yet still keep that sort of signature style intact that people would recognize and say, Oh, that's a John Parra's book, which people do say now." Even then, he seeks to make each book different:

> Because if I use the same color palette again and again and again, the same sort of
> structure again and again and again, it gets very dull, for myself just even. I don't
> want to be that repetitive, yet still, the characters are drawn in my same approach
> and technique and research is done in that way.

As a result, variations often come in the form of distinctive color palettes and visual references to ground each book in its context. Juana's experimentation happens as incremental changes and gradual incorporation of new techniques. While admitting that her art looks relatively consistent, Juana shared that she did not intentionally plan to keep a signature look:

I would love for people not to be able to see that it's my work, like it's something that feels completely different. That's what I'm chasing. Freshness, something that still looks new you know, and loose at the same time. I just work. I work. I don't worry too much about what people are going to say. I really don't. Not when I'm painting.

In addition, contextual factors may also play a role. As discussed above, Brian Pinkney's drastic move to a new medium was the result of a combination of factors, including the chance encounter with a Tai-chi inspired art workshop, the practical constraints of working from home among young children, and the support of his editor and others in his professional network. In contrast, Floyd Cooper, an artist with a high degree of stylistic consistency who takes pride in his signature method, feels strongly the pressure from the market to remain predictable. His consistency comes with a tinge of resignation.

Finally, there is also the issue of genre. Some artists may navigate towards a particular kind of story or subject matter. For example, John has said he is impartial to biographies, particularly stories about folk heroes—ordinary people who made remarkable achievements. This partly explains why many of his books are in this category. Juana seeks emotional connection and stories that engage with and push back against certain stereotypes. Hyewon wrote and illustrated many stories that drew from her own experiences. Floyd Cooper's realistic, sepia-toned painting makes it particularly suited to historical stories and he is often specifically sought out to illustrate this type of texts. In that way, the artists' choice of story is already part of their personal expression. Style, therefore, is not necessarily separable from content.

CHAPTER 4: PRACTICING ILLUSTRATION AS PICTURE BOOK ARTISTS

As professionals in a specialized industry, illustrators operate within the constraints of deadlines, budgets, format, reproduction, and various relationships, many of which are opaque to outsiders and beginners. As artists, they create in the specific medium of the picture book. This chapter situates and characterizes their activities in these two different roles.

Participating in the Publishing Industry

American children's book publishing is a massively commercial industry of which artists and writers constitute only a small part. Editors, designers, printers, marketing people, reviewers, booksellers all play a role in an interdependent chain. Many have critiqued the structural problems in the contemporary publishing industry. Schiffrin (2001), for example, has voiced concern about the increasing emphasis on profit in publishing as a result of increased conglomerate control. In children's book publishing in particular, "corporate acquisitiveness further batters what was once a nice, staid little business" (Roxburgh, 2000, p. 653). Taxel (2001) points out that the underfunding of the library systems and the blurred boundary between traditional editorial decision making and marketing starting in the 1980s has contributed to the intensified focus on commercial, fast-selling books. Commercialism has also led to other phenomena like merchandising children's media characters, serializing popular books, and promoting authors and artists as brands (Taxel, 2001). In the US, the library market plays an important role in the overall sales of a children's book. Some of the most prestigious awards for children's books are given by library associations. This makes artists' participation in the industry even more complicated.

In addition, many have maintained that the industry has a diversity problem. A baseline survey of publishing staff administered by Lee & Low Books (2016) and answered by eight review journals and 34 publishers of all sizes in North America shows that the vast majority is White (79%) and female (78%); heterosexual (88%) and able-bodied (92%). Lee & Low Books (2016) suggests that there could be "the tendency - conscious or unconscious - for executives, editors, marketers, salespeople, and reviewers to work with, develop, and recommend books by and about people who are like them" (para. 29).

Against this backdrop, illustrators' entrance, participation, and success in the industry is particularly complex. I do not aim to draw direct connections between the industry and the individual artists. Rather, by outlining three specific aspects of their work as professionals, I seek to complicate the conventional understanding of illustrators' work as purely creative, medium-specific practice and acknowledge the business, pragmatic side of their work as well.

Getting Started in the Industry

Although there are some variations, the publishing process typically goes through a few discrete stages, starting with a script written by a writer. After it is accepted for publication, the writer may work with an editor to make necessary revisions. The publisher then will look for a suitable illustrator, often via an agent who represents the artist. With the whole process in place, the manuscript has to go through many filtering mechanisms before arriving at an illustrator, making it particularly challenging for new illustrators to break into the industry. The participating artists' stories of how they got started gesture towards the importance of education, professional membership, relationship, and recognition. They also demonstrate the powerful influence of chance.

All of the artists were formally trained in visual arts. School was the space to not only learn and experiment but also to meet people and find professional opportunities. John has credited his finding a visual style to meeting an artist who came to talk at his school, and Brian developed his scratchboard technique during his master's program. Hyewon Yum had studied fine art and printmaking in Korea when she stumbled upon picture books and decided to become an illustrator. She came to New York to attend the School of Visual Arts. That was also where she met her first editor:

> I met my first editor, Frances Foster, while I was in my first year in SVA. I emailed her. Of course I didn't expect she would actually meet me. But she did. And then I invited her to my thesis show and she liked the book I made and published it as it was, without any changes! (quoted in Wellington, 2016, para. 8)

> That first book, *Last Night* (2008), won many acclaims including the Golden Kite Award and an Honorable Mention for the Bologna Ragazzi Award and started her career. Frances Foster also published a number of other books by her. Hyewon continues to consider Foster one of her best editors and mentors:

> After she looked through my dummy, she told me, "There is something in here." And that was it. I had to find out how to make it into a book. It took me a long time to make another dummy. How happy I was when she said, "I think you did it!" That was how Frances taught me how to write: she just waited, she never forced me to change my story this way or that way. But whenever I was about to give up becoming a writer, she checked on me and asked, "How is your story going?" And she always told me that I am good. (quoted in Lodge, 2013, para. 18)

Of the five artists, John and Floyd did not plan to become children's book illustrators. Their origin story has both a strong element of chance and a structural explanation—the increased concern about diversity and cultural representation in children's book publishing. John was working as a commercial illustrator when an art director contacted him and asked him to do a children's book about Gabriela Mistral, a Chilean poet. His art was perceived to be a good fit both visually and thematically: its bright colors and folk-art style as well as the imagery he tended to include were considered suitable for children's books and Latinx themes. After the success of this first book, he has published many others also with Latinx themes before expanding into other topics. In Floyd Cooper's case, his first picture book titled *Grandpa's Face* was written by Eloise Greenfield, an accomplished Black writer. Only many years after he had completed it did he learn that the author Greenfield had demanded her book be illustrated by a Black artist. Although the publisher told her they could not find an available artist, she insisted. They kept looking and Floyd was found as a result of this persistence. That first book brought him attention and marked the start of his career in children's books. Floyd also credited his former agent, Libby Ford for his success: "She got my work in front of the right people and basically launched my career" (quoted in Tate, 2009, para. 17).

The final story of becoming an illustrator was told by Juana and revealed a complex set of circumstances surrounding her beginning. Born in Lima, the capital of Peru to a family of artists, she attended the School of Fine Arts at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and was told that she was more of an illustrator than a painter, but illustration was not a robust career choice:

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Since illustration was not a career in Peru, I had to ask my professors what did an illustrator do? The answer was disappointing to say the least, they said: "an illustrator paints the backgrounds for theater companies." As much as that sounded exciting and interesting, it was not what I wanted to do. Completely unsure of what to do next, I took a year off from Art School and traveled to Los Angeles. I never moved back to Peru. (quoted in KidLit411, 2018, para. 5)

In 2005, after working many years in another profession and having her second son, Juana desperately wanted a change and started to look into children's illustration. However, breaking into the industry was not easy. "I was ready, but the projects weren't coming because people didn't know about my work, or they weren't willing to risk a project with my work, you know," she told me. It was not until winning the SCBWI illustration mentorship in 2011 and the prestigious SCBWI Portfolio Grand Prize in 2012 that she started to gain more recognition. In 2014, she received her first contract from a trade publisher for *La Madre Goose* (Putnam), which was published in 2016. After that, things started to move quickly. She has since illustrated five other books, won various prestigious awards, and debuted as an author-illustrator with *Alma and How She Got Her Name*. The difficult beginning gave her insights into the importance of persistence and regular, serious practice:

Illustration, much like writing and every other profession, requires everyday practice. If you rush to get twelve new pieces ready a month or two before a portfolio show, chances are, your pieces will be decent. But decent doesn't win a show. You must work everyday, year round. (quoted in Weaver, 2013, para. 5)

Juana also emphasized a systematic approach to getting noticed; her advice to new illustrators includes keeping the portfolio updated, mailing out postcards every three or four months, and researching and finding an agent, whose knowledge of the industry will help improve their work:

> Look into agents' clients and books. Follow them on Twitter. See if your work is a good match. Keep in mind that if they have someone with a style too similar to yours, chances are, you won't be picked. Why have two artists that do almost the same work? (quoted in Weaver, 2013, para. 19)

Managing Relationships in Negotiated Authorship

While the writer and editor work together and attend to the written text, the visual aspects are the domain of the illustrator, designer, and art director. Although there are cases where the process is involved and iterative with the whole team working closely together throughout (see, for example, Kerper (2002)), it is still a norm to keep the visual and verbal sides separate. Children's author W. Nikola-Lisa (2005) likens it to making a film, where a team of experts "contribute their specific expertise and sensitivities" to the end product, a process that capitalizes on individuals' capability but is "not necessarily collaborative" (p. 819). It is this separation that sometimes allows for interesting and surprising visual rendering of the written story.

> After going through this process now some half dozen times, I have come to marvel at it, especially the unpredictable ways of the illustrator whose job it is to communicate directly—vis-a-vis visual images—with a young and lively reading audience rather than with me. (Nikola-Lisa, 2005, p. 818)

On the visual side, the art director and artist work together to discuss ideas, sketches, book dummies before the artist starts painting. After the artist has completed creating images for the story, the designer integrates the text and illustrations. A first printout of the book, called galley proof, is usually produced for review and allows more changes to be made before the book is sent to print. Despite the stereotype of artists working in isolation, the process of creating illustration for books is actually intensely social.

First, artists regularly seek inspiration and information from others during the ideation and research phase. Although illustrators and writers often do not work together, when illustrating *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* (2019), Juana received materials from the writer, Kevin Noble Maillard, as part of her research. This is one of the rare picture books celebrating Native culture and it draws on the writer's own childhood memories of making and eating fry bread. Kevin's own heritage as both Native American and Black inspired Juana to create a cast of multiracial characters and incorporate Seminole details as one way to honor the writer and his family. Another example is John Parra's experience with *Little Libraries, Big Heroes* (2019), written by Miranda Paul. Having worked on many biographies before, John Parra had a rare opportunity this time to meet face to face with the main character of this book, Todd Bol, the founder of the Little Free Library organization, and listen to Bol's childhood stories. John explained in a previous interview:

> I reached out to founder Todd Bol to see if he was willing to speak to me and
> provide possible reference material that I could use for creating the work. Todd was
> extremely helpful and wonderful in this regard. I think my first phone call with him

went so well that we spoke well over an hour. He talked of his childhood, focus,

motivation, and how his whole adventure in Little Free Libraries started. We stayed

in touch throughout the project, and I even had dinner with him and his wife here in

New York. I also researched online and obtained reference material for additional

info and inspiration. (quoted in Aldrich, 2019, para. 4)

Second, illustrators often seek and receive plenty of feedback. Sketches often need

to be approved before the artist starts to paint. In some cases, the art director works as

critic, mentor, reader and plays a significant role in shaping the art. In her acceptance

speech at Pura Belpré 2018, Juana credited her art director Cecilia Yung for pushing her

work: "Even when I thought I was done, she shipped the artwork back and asked me to

'make it sing'." She explained further during the research interview: "She was so brilliant.

She never tells you what to do. She just poses questions. And she makes you think, and

makes you make the decisions for the book, which is wonderful." In other cases, the art

director and other people may mainly serve as another pair of eyes. In John's work,

feedback is only done on the sketches:

It's never done at the painting phase, never when I'm painting because everything

should be settled by that point. (...) I introduce my sketches, they come back and tell

me, John fix this and this. Everything they usually come back with is pretty much

spot on, makes sense to improve it. An extra pair of eyes always helps settle some

things that I might not have seen.

He gave an example from working on *Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos* (2017). He had

included a skeleton in Frida's accident scene, which made some people on the team

nervous, but they eventually agreed with him.

It's small, very small things. I don't find disagreements too much. If I can explain my reason well enough, they seem to say yeah, okay we can see it that way. They're very respectful in that sense. I think I'm fortunate at this point in my career where they trust me, and if I really feel like this is the reason why it should be there, they kind of understand it.

Finally, many artists work with the same art directors for years and with the same authors multiple times, which suggests the importance of forming and maintaining productive professional relationships. Hyewon's relationship with her editor Frances Foster described in a previous section is one such example. Brian and his wife Andrea exemplify an interesting case where the artist and the author share a home. Their success in cooperating over many years and on more than 20 books depends on maintaining certain boundaries to allow the other to work on their own art. Brian has a separate studio that he commutes to and his wife rarely visits. They have a designated day to discuss work at a restaurant. They also developed a strategic way of giving feedback to keep it productive and minimize hurt feelings: no crosstalk, no interrupting, taking turns to start the conversation, and choosing words carefully. Brian gave an example from their book about Alvin Ailey:

> If Andrea's looking at one of my sketches and something doesn't look quite right, she can't say ... 'Alvin Ailey's foot looks like a football,' because that kind of hurts my feelings. (....) She has to say something like: 'Alvin Ailey's foot looks unresolved.' (quoted in Garcia-Navarro et al., 2019, para 15)

The combination of the relative independence from the writer and the social experience of creating the visual images makes for an interesting case of collective,

negotiated authorship. Some people see this as a potential problem, such as Nikolajeva and

Scott (2001) who write:

> While purists may declare that the iconotext is all and supports whatever
>
> interpretations seem appropriate, the interpretation of the relationship between
>
> image and text also becomes increasingly complex as the number of people involved
>
> in its creation increases and their collaboration diminishes. Multiple ownership and
>
> multiple intentionality lead to ambiguity and uncertainty in the validity of the
>
> interpretation (p. 29).

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) believe that single authorship (when the writer is also the

illustrator or when they work very closely together) is a better guarantee of well-

integrated text and illustration and allows for more "confident interpretation", especially

when there are questions about whether an "apparent discrepancy is intended" (p. 31).

However, confident interpretations may not be desirable, or even possible even with single

authorship considering the influence of context, chance, individual idiosyncrasies, and

other factors. Negotiated, collective authorship, in fact, presents an opportunity to study

the creative tensions not only between modes of communication but also between the

participants in the process, not only the artists but also their circumstances and

communities.

Balancing Personal Interests and Practical Demands

When presented with a manuscript, the illustrator could decide whether to take the

job. Since the story has already been vetted by the publisher and revised, if needed, with

the help of the editor, to John, saying yes is often not difficult. "Sometimes it's not even the

story that I'm maybe not quite connected to; it's just my schedule. (...) So it might be, you

love the story, but you can't work on it because of other obligations-- work obligations, family obligations, things like that," he explained. John enjoys a story that "takes place in an interesting place, or the character is interesting" or has a compelling visual dimension. He has an affinity for biographies, especially those that feature ordinary people making an impact and positive, proactive messages, and many of his books belong to this category. Although he has not encountered such problems in manuscripts he received, he names among his turn-offs issues like violence, racism, and stereotypes. Above all, he expresses the desire for each project to be a chance to have fun.

Brian echoed this sentiment when saying he wanted each new project to be 'a journey', a 'relationship' that he could enter and an opportunity to learn or try something new. The right manuscripts for Hyewon often lead her to "picture something right away." Similarly, Juana's decision is guided by an emotional and visual connection to the work:

I read the manuscript and in order for me to take a project I have to have the characters and the scene in my head. Otherwise, I can't. And I have to be emotionally moved, deeply [...]. If I don't get that from a manuscript, clearly it's not a manuscript for me. It's that simple. To me something feels right and it's very instinctive.

Therefore, the artists' choice of project is often guided by both their personal interests and the unique connections they form with the story, sometimes instinctive and instantaneous.

Another thing that can influence their decision is the economic aspect of the job. Floyd told me that the need to "keep the lights on" might dictate his decision. John himself expressed gratitude that he is no longer a "struggling artist" and can feel more free to turn down jobs that he does not quite feel excited about. The precarity aspect of artistic life is well-known and is a practical demand they need to manage. Juana told me about having

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reservation about her first trade book, *La Marde Goose* (2016) (written by Susan Middleton Elya), a nursery rhymes book that retells classic Mother Goose rhymes with a Latinx twist:

> I was given about 25 poems. Only 14 made it in the book. (...) I can't remember exactly how it is, but these poems come with a white gaze. So in some poems which mostly I did not illustrate, I thought they were… they just didn't ring true to my point of view. There was something off, but I didn't quite put my finger on it. So all the poems that I wasn't quite that sure, I said let's not illustrate that one, let's not illustrate that one. That was one of the reasons why I was hesitant. And then this was my first book, I was very afraid of saying something and then not getting any more work or not enough and I'd lose my project. You know, all these fears when you're new to the business. If I were to be given that manuscript now, I would not have illustrated it. But it was my first book, and I wouldn't have had all these other books if it wasn't for that first one. It's just part of how things work.

Juana's decision indicated the difficult balance between her personal sensibility, her desire to get published, the manuscript itself, and her awareness of the industry. Now that she is in a more secure position, she can afford to be more selective and truer to her artistic vision but a certain degree of compromise may be needed at an early stage.

Illustrating as Artistic-Intellectual Practices

This section frames illustrators' work as artistic-intellectual practices. I distinguish

between skills or qualities and practices. There are essential artistic skills to develop to

succeed as children's book illustrators, such as the ability to draw children and animals, use

colors, create strong composition, master the art medium, and maintain consistency of the

characters and objects across multiple pages. Some of these skills are common with other

fields of visual arts, while others (such as movement and consistency) are more specific to

the art of visual storytelling. Alan Male (2007), for example, lists the following as necessary

qualities for successful illustrators: the ability to use a range of media both traditional and

digital, competent academic drawing practice, creative solving of visual and conceptual

problems. There are also fields of knowledge that would facilitate illustrators' work.

Salisbury (2004) distinguishes between what he calls 'mechanical skills' and 'conceptual

skills: the former refers to draughtsmanship, or the ability to render convincing images on

a two-dimensional surface while the latter involves more elusive and less teachable

qualities like imagination and visual sensibility. While mechanical skills are relatively

straightforward, 'visual sensibility' or 'vision' remains undertheorized. Blaiklock (2019)

calls these terms 'placeholders' that "describe the expertise of successful illustrators whose

picture making is highly regarded by other practitioners, academics, commentators, and

critics" (p. 187). Thus, it is often retrospectively defined, and more work should be done to

articulate it.

Skills, knowledge, or personal qualities get mobilized or come into being in specific

practices. For example, Salisbury (2004) offers the suggestion below to emerging artists

about sketchbook practices where doing, knowing and thinking are entangled. The

sketchbook becomes a space to facilitate observation, and drawing is a means of reasoning, learning, and gaining knowledge:

> Don't be afraid to end up with page after page of unfinished scribbles. Each mark, and each brief act of committing a line or contour to paper, will add to your store of knowledge. This process is part skill development (developing your own ways of processing and recording information) and part social/anthropological study (learning about behavior). (Salisbury, 2004, p. 24).

I am most interested in practices that involve inquiry, meaning making, reasoning, and evaluating in a particular artistic medium or context. The rest of this section describes five major practices that constitute the work of children's book illustrators, namely making to know, drawing for adults and children, engaging the book form, responding to genre, and creating visual narratives.

Making to Know

There are two main tools for illustrators to get to know their characters, stories, or ideas: sketches of characters or objects and thumbnails or dummies which plan out the look of the whole page.

Juana's story of how she 'found' the little girl in her author/illustrator book *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (2018) illustrates the important role of sketches. She was chasing the story at the same time she was looking for its character. Over a few years, she created five different versions of Alma. One day she looked through her family album and drew her grandmother from one of the photos.

> And then I drew this little girl next to her. Right at that moment I knew I had it. But why? I mean I loved every version of Alma that I did before but I didn't have that

click. (...) I feel like in some way it felt flat. That's what it is: it felt flat. Like there was

no spunk, there was no backstory. And this one, it was a mix of my daughter and me.

That's what this last version of Alma was. It felt real. As soon as I drew it, it felt real,

it felt right. Yeah, it's hard to explain...

In her story, it was the relationship between two juxtaposed images that triggered

the perception of fit and clarified her own intention. It would then allow her to see the

qualities of her own work. Her next step was to draw the girl in various poses and from

different angles to get to know how this character looks and moves.

An example of the use of thumbnails can be seen below. Here, Floyd Cooper uses

this tool to try out different compositions of the page. Once he decided on the best option, a

more detailed sketch was produced.

Figure 10: Progress from thumbnail, sketch to finished artwork by Floyd Cooper for a page
in *Ben and the Emancipation Proclamation.* Images courtesy of the artist.

In Floyd Cooper's signature technique, he uses a kneaded eraser to erase shapes

from an illustration board covered with a thin layer of oil paint to produce the

underpainting. Colors are added after those shapes are established. Sometimes he makes

sketches directly on the surface of the oil wash before reaching for his favorite eraser. The

lines will disappear after his subtractive process is complete. He was careful to mention

that sketches should not be too detailed, however, as they may sap the energy and freshness of the images.

Thumbnails could also be used to study the mood, transition, and other aspects of the story. When Hyewon first made a few thumbnails for what would later become her thesis and her first book *Last Night* (2008), she did not have a clear idea of the story yet. A wordless book made with linocut, it required her to plan carefully in advance, so she worked through various versions of sketches and thumbnails, getting progressively more precise:

> I made bigger sketches and planned what color goes where, where I should cut on the linocut. Then print! I started with lighter colors, then made more cuts on the plate, then printed darker colors. After I made prints for all the images, I scanned them and printed them out on watercolor paper and bound them together. (quoted in Wellington, 2016, para. 6)

Figure 11: Example of Hyewon Yum's use of thumbnails and dummies for *Last Night* (2008)*.* Images courtesy of the artist.

Different from all the other artists whose painting (or printing) phase is meticulous and separate from sketching, Brian works instinctively, meditatively, and quickly in watercolor. He has a unique solution to balance the lack of planning and the need for rigor for his work: He paints directly without making a sketch beforehand and then repeats to make multiple versions of the same image. The time waiting for a layer to dry becomes a time to process. The created images become the physical objects that can easily lend

themselves to re-looking, co-looking, comparing, and discovering. As discussed earlier in description of his style, separating making and looking is essential to his creative process. The act of looking is even further externalized by involving others, including his father, his wife, his friends, his publisher. Time could also be used productively. In his own words,

> It's almost like you do a little dance with the brush and it's recorded, and I play it back. (…) Now what I do is I'll do two versions of something, or three, or four, six, and I can narrow it down to three and then I'll take them to the publisher, and I have another set of eyes look at them or show them to my wife or to my friends. Then they'll be able to kind of go, "Wow this was really good," and then they'll point out why. Now, months later I can see why, but usually immediately I can't tell.

Alternating between making and looking may be the most important insight from this practice. In all of these examples, the artists often did not know beforehand everything that they need to create and how they can do so. Rather, creating, either through painting or drawing, helps ideas become externalized, which then enables them to be looked at, described, compared, organized, evaluated, adjusted, or discarded. Knowing unfolds and evolves through these acts. This iterative process engages both intuition, tacit knowledge, and systematic intellectual process. Mario Minichiello (2014, p. 179, cited in Minichiello, 2019, p. 264) calls this process a type of "action research methodology" that helps him develop the connection between thinking and doing, reflecting and refining. In addition:

> As it is an endless process of adjustment and readjustment, a drawing may never be finished; instead the illustrator makes a judgment about when the process should stop. In making a drawing we learn to "look" as an active way of seeing to acquire

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information and transfer this to a surface, making constant adjustments in our

working process. (Minichiello, 2019, p. 266)

Drawing for Adults and Children

Drawing for an audience is characteristic of an illustrator's work. While an artist could claim to practice 'art for art's sake', an illustrator cannot do the same. When asked about her imagined audiences, Hyewon named "Kids and their parents, grandparents and their teachers. I imagine them close to each other on the rug, on the bed and read my books together." As adults who make books for children, whose access to books often depends on the adults around them, illustrators have to resolve the rather complicated relationship with these two groups of audience. John directly acknowledged this tension:

I want it to be as interesting to adults as it is for the children because there's a balance. You want to make sure, because parents buy the books, and they have to be interested, and they have to say, "This is really interesting." But it also appeals to the kids and so the images have to work and be, you know, attractive to kids.

One way that the participating artists accomplish this is to reject the child-adult binary and the notion of child-friendliness. Hyewon, for example, said: "Since I am a mother of two boys, I'm already very child-friendly. I don't really think separately adult readers with kids." Regarding the portrayal of emotions, which is a dominant theme in her work, she elaborated:

I think adults and children don't feel differently. I am all grown up, but still feel anxious when I start new things, still little jealous for my sister. Readers of the picture books are not just kids. But most of time grown-ups read picture books to their kids. I thought it would be nice if both of them can relate to the stories. So I try

to tell the stories from both sides, if possible, in a humorous way. (quoted in Yeom, 2019, p. 2)

Similarly, Juana emphasized children's equal intellectual capacity and argued against simplifying the work:

Children are as brilliant and as sharp as adults. They really are. They are able to handle very complex concepts, they just need to be given the chance to do it, and I don't think you're doing a good job in your work if you're dumbing down the work, you know what I mean? I see my children, my daughter is 6.5, and she could understand huge concepts and will talk to you about it and ask questions. Children are like that. They just need to get the opportunity to be treated as bright as they are.

Second, the artists often describe themselves as adults who share key features with children. This position blurs the child-adult binary for them personally and, at the same time, sustains certain essentialist ways to define children. Juana talked about drawing on the childlike part of hers, which is emotion: "I'm an adult who still feels very strongly, like children do." Brian described himself as "an adult by age" but "childlike in nature":

[W]hen I'm making my artwork I'm childlike in terms of what I'm making. Like I'm there, I'm in that zone, I'm in that mindset. If it's about a three-year-old, I'm seeing the world from the perspective of a three-year-old. If that's a book about a ten-year-old, like in *Martin Rising* or something, then I'm creating with that energy. It just happens intuitively. (…) If I'm writing a book about a three-year-old I wouldn't even think about putting a word there that I'm sure a three year old would understand. So to my mind it's almost in sync at that level. It happens when I present to children

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also. If I'm presenting to four-year-olds, I'm just naturally talking to a four-year-old, in the words I choose, how I phrase things. If I'm talking to an adult, I'm naturally on that wavelength. It takes no effort at all.

This automatic, instinctive role-playing allows him to be himself as he creates art. His reference to age, however, echoes the idea about fundamental differences between the ages. Visually, his art for baby books is markedly different from his other works.

Third, the artists often frame their work in intrinsic terms—that they do their books for themselves. Juana talked about approaching her work in a way to keep herself entertained. John expressed a similar sentiment:

Again, going back to art school, making the kind of connection that means something to me, making it personalized, making it fun again, and enjoyable, and not just a clinical type, a coldness to it. (…) Children's books have to have that warmth, that kind of connection, I think, and it translates. I think all those little things add up. I hope so, in a sense, that people get that same feeling from my books.

Fourth, the artists talked about books as containing layers and multitudes that can connect to different people at the same time. Structurally, certain components of the book may address the adults more directly. John reminded me that many books have extensive end matter material with information about the inspirations, the story behind it, and other details.

I think it gives that extra depth, that extra information which appeals to, not necessarily the kids because it's sometimes quite wordy, obviously, like a page or two of this information. So that appeals to adults, and they may go 'Wow, that's really interesting'. And adults can then maybe translate that to the kids and impart

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that when they're reading the story. A parent could go like, 'Did you know that this person did this?' You know what I mean? You could add those extra things to it and explain to the child that the story is a folk tale or an exaggeration.

Certain genres, such as biographies, may have broad appeal. John said:

I'm attracted to a lot of biographies and I think that's an easy way to connect the two, you know? A lot of people like biographies as an adult, but if a story lends itself in a very fun way it still appeals to kids.

Moreover, the same stories could have multiple levels of meanings or references that appeal to different audiences. With *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (2018), Juana noted that the book is not only about names, but also about family, about identity and history.

It's seemingly a simple story, this little story of this little girl and her parents and relatives and those she was named after, but within that story you have this underlying huge concept of identity. That's the most important – who you are and how you become who you are, which is a huge concept, a deep, deep, deep thought, a humongous thing. And I truly think that children are able to handle that. They always want to know who they are or why they do what they do. (…) So it's supposed to be 3 to 8, but I think it can be used, and it has been used and it's being used far beyond 3 to 8.

John's *Frida Kahlo and Her Amalitos* (2017) is similarly layered:

It's about a real person, a famous artist from Mexico, Frida Kahlo. But it's about her animals. Kids can relate to that because it's like your pet. We do this fun thing when I go speak with them. "So we're going to do self-portraits and you're going to put

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your pet in the portraits". And they have fun with it. "I'm going to put my dog in there!" If they don't have a pet, they can put something imaginary, a dragon or something. (...) A lot of adults love Frida Kahlo and her works, and it's a biography, so that appeals to adults. (...) But there are also other levels with that book: it talks about disabilities and not letting it define you.

The nod to people with more specialized knowledge could also be done through including specific, strategic details. In that same book, John talks about a detail that adults may be more likely to recognize:

There's actually a sketch by Frida, showing the accident, and I took the sketch of hers and I incorporated it into the painting in a sense. That composition, not the literal translation. I just chose how she saw it from her sketch and then I incorporated it. (…) So if you were an adult, an art history major and I pointed this out to you, that would be an interesting aspect about the book.

These four strategies, three discursive and one textual, together help the artists address the complexity of making books for both children and adults.

Engaging the Book Form

The book can be considered the actual medium of the illustrator. As discussed earlier in Chapter One, the sketches, paintings, drawings, or photographs they produce are only an intermediate step in the process. An illustrator's success needs to be considered in the context of the accompanying text and the overall book. Many aspects of the book that can contribute a lot to the reading experience, such as the quality of the paper and printing, binding, the weight, and shape, may not be up to the illustrator but the designer, art director or publisher. Besides, technological and economic reasons can be as relevant as

aesthetic ones, if not more. For example, the fact that the number of pages in a picture book is always a multiple of eight (and most often 32) is a result of the standard cost-saving printing procedure in which eight pages are printed on each side of a large sheet of paper which is later folded and cut. The text is often in black to save on the printing of translated versions (Salisbury & Styles, 2012).

Yet there are a number of other affordances of the book form that illustrators could mobilize as additional tools, including paratext (cover, jacket, end paper), page layout, page break, and materiality.

Paratexts. Paratexts refer to the supporting parts of the book, including front matter and back matter. Gérard Genette (cited in Pantaleo, 2018, p. 38) describes the paratext as a threshold, an "undefined zone between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)", a space "not only of transition but of transaction". This space has the potential to contribute to the overall meaning of the story and many of the books created by the participants make good use of it to introduce story elements, prepare the readers for the story, create an atmosphere, or give extra information.

Hyewon's *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten!* (2012) opens with an endpaper depicting a child getting himself ready for school: he brushes his teeth, puts on his shorts and shirt, struggles a bit with his socks and shoes, then puts his bright red backpack on his back, and finally stands triumphantly, tall and proud. Showing this series of actions unfolding like an animation, it introduces readers to a confident, independent child, thus starting the narrative even before the story 'officially' begins.

In Juana's *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017), the half title, dedication, glossary pages and illustrator's note are all accompanied by images, offering glimpses into the story-world and making readers linger a bit longer as they not only read but also look. The dedication and glossary pages, especially, appear on the same spread and show the princess on a donkey, looking over a green valley. This hints that she is the main protagonist with a backstory although she does not appear until the third spread of the story. At the end of the book, the illustrator's note explains the inspiration for some artistic choices and ends with a call to readers to "value and protect these groups so they can maintain their culture and traditions and continue to thrive in the future." Underneath, the princesa can be seen weaving next to a sleeping cat with a flower crown on its head and a guinea pig on a pile of wool, two supporting characters from the story. This extends the main narrative but also merges the story in the book and the illustrator's own story.

Another interesting use of the paratexts can be seen in *Fry Bread* (2019). The author, Kevin Noble Maillard, included both a fry bread recipe and an eight-page annotated author's note in which he explains in detail each main idea in the book and discusses issues like colonialism, tribal sovereignty. Juana used the endpapers to list the names of hundreds of Native American tribes, both big and small, including those who have not been officially recognized by the US government. She explained this in a previous interview:

> I normally figure out the endpapers for the book while I'm deep in the middle of sketching the interior spreads. But this book was different. While I was working on ideas and thumbnails for *Fry Bread*, the idea for what the endpapers should show came to mind. It was a feeling. I could see the children and parents following the names with their fingers looking for the name of their Nation or Tribe. On a call with

my editors, I shared my crazy idea of making the endpapers a list of the names of all

the US Nations and Tribes. I'm glad they felt it was a good idea because I was ready

to talk to them until they said it was okay. (quoted in Schu, 2019, para. 9)

These endpapers, in addition to extending the text itself, become an affirmative tribute and

a teaching resource.

Page layout and page break. Page break is another interesting semiotic device in

picture books. In contrast to texts such as novels, where page break is often an arbitrary

interruption in the continuous flow of reading, a picture book is often carefully structured

through a series of facing pages called 'double-spreads', or 'page openings' (Doonan, 1992,

p. 83) to create movement and a sense of anticipation.

The text is divided in such a way that the pauses in the story caused by the presence

of illustrations add to the suspense. Readers want to turn the page and find out what

happens next, but they also want to stop where they are and pay close attention to a

picture. The characteristic rhythm of picture books consists of a pattern of such

delays counterpointing and contributing to the suspense of the plot. (Nodelman &

Reimer 2003, 296)

Page layout and page break are often planned out and refined through the creation

of book dummies. In the figure below, John Parra's book dummy shows the way he chunked

the story into passages, each of which corresponds to a spread. John tends to make use of

the whole spread as one single image, and the composition of the page never repeats itself.

Figure 12: John Parra's use of thumbnails for *Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos* (2017)*.
Images courtesy of the artist.*

Brian's *Max Found Two Sticks* (1994) is another good example of this meticulous and intentional planning of both the overall book and individual pages. The first spread containing the title page, before the story starts, shows a sky-ward view of an urban neighborhood. Once the page is turned, a good view of the street is revealed, and Max is showed sitting on the steps to his building, his grandpa washing the window nearby. Max picks up two fallen twigs and tapped on his thigh, his grandpa curiously looking on. In the next spread, another scene appears: Max still on the step, now tiny, next to his grandpa on a ladder, but the main part of the picture is a group of pigeons flying up. Behind them, a group of children running, some with their arms outstretched as if imitating the pigeons.
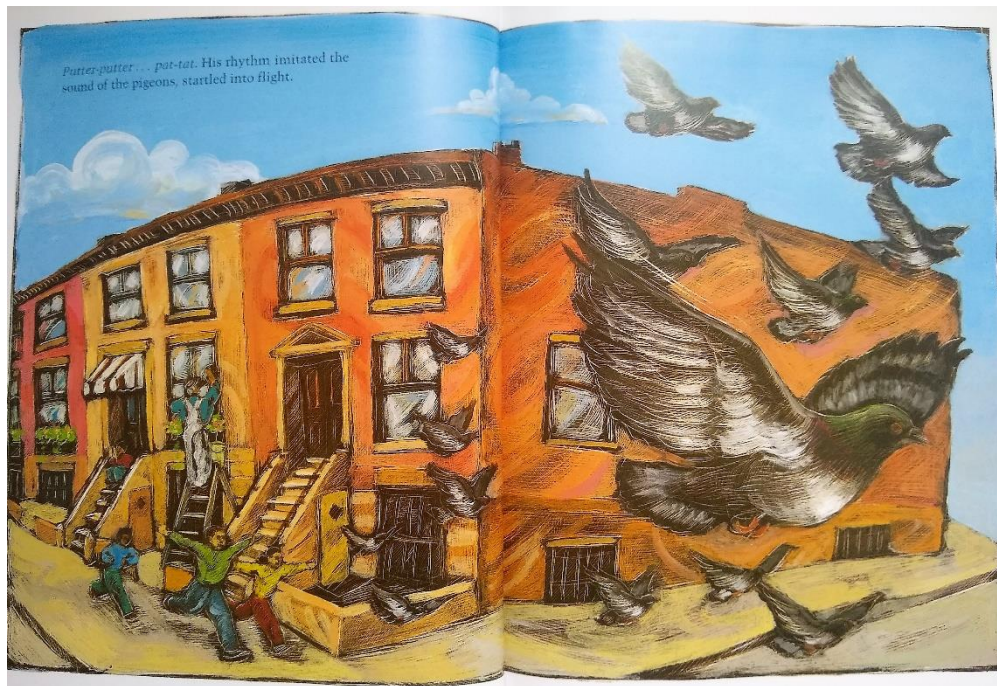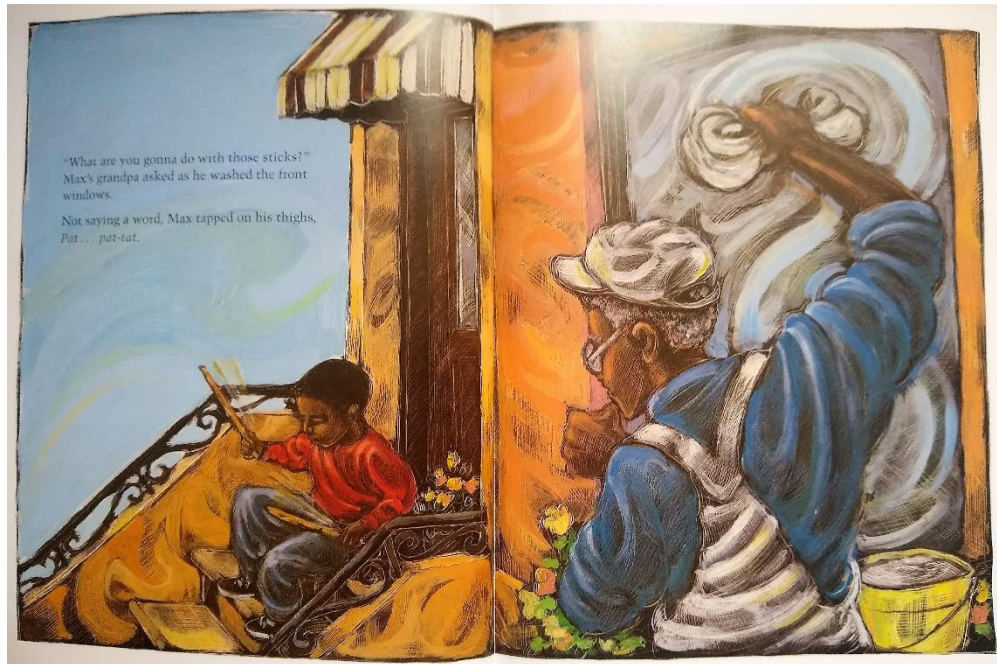
Figure 13: Two continuous spreads from *Max Found Two Sticks* (1994), written and illustrated by Brian Pinkney. Images used with permission from the artist.

Brian explained:

Part of it is when I'm designing the whole book, I want to make sure that there's a range. It's almost like I was a movie director, going from maybe a close-up image to something more panoramic. (...) So when you flip the page I almost wanted to be like, you are one of the pigeons flying. You can hear the sounds of the pigeons, pat pat pat... So it's almost like you the readers are the sounds of the pigeons, up close with the pigeons. So, I wanted a kind of movement from one page to the next. (...) So your eye actually went from being with the grandfather cleaning the window to the pigeons, like pigeons on the camera. Not really camera as I'm not really into it cinematically, it's more about the sound of the pigeons.

In Barbara Bader's (1976) words, this is an instance of "the drama of the turning of the page" (p. 1). The story moves forward; grandpa's question is answered, and a new question is presented. Anticipation is resolved, new information is added. Of the many kinds of gaps in picture books, the gaps between the spreads can be considered an ideal place for readers' engagement.

An example of effective use of the page layout is Hyewon's *The Twins' Blanket* (2011) where sibling rivalry is visually marked by locating each girl on an opposite side of the page. The symmetry of the image and the distance between the two characters are maintained across quite a few pages to communicate the conflict. Towards the end of the book, the girls move closer and closer to each other across the gutter.

In another example from *A Piece of Home* (2016), Hee Jun and his mother are seen in the midst of packing up their belongings. Then the actions "crated, nailed, and mailed" are depicted on the opposite page in separate parallel frames, a device more often associated

with comic books. Hyewon's composition echoes the abrupt and disorienting experience of moving countries.

The gutter, the middle point of a spread where the pages are bound to the spine, is usually a physical constraint: text or illustration crossing the gutter may be broken or obscured in the binding process. In these examples, it becomes a visual device that helps heighten the sense of drama.

Figure 14: A spread from Hyewon Yum's *The Twins' Blanket* (2011). Image courtesy of the artist.
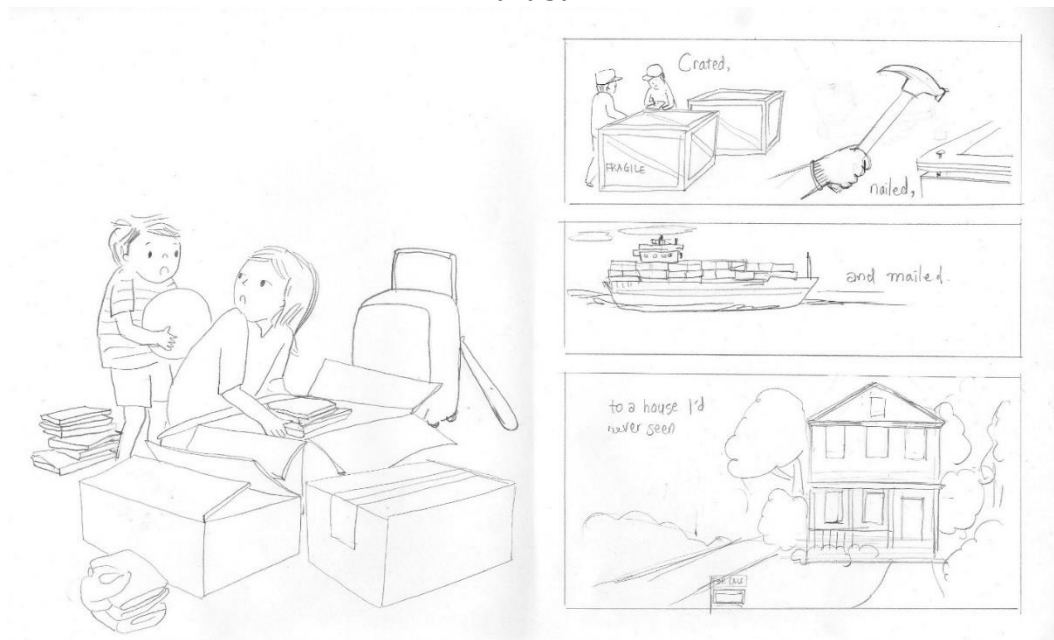

Figure 15: Sketches and page layout for a spread from *A Piece of Home* (2016) illustrated by Hyewon Yum. Images courtesy of the artist.

Texture and materiality. Texture is hard to show on the typically smooth and uniform surface of the mass-produced page. Evoking materiality, then, becomes an interesting challenge. It has been made possible by many exacting reproduction techniques previously not available. Brian confirmed that in general the current printing technology is effective. He gave an example from working on *The Faithful Friends* (1999), using the scratchboard technique:

> I had done it with this laborsome process, with all these layers and they sent me the book, the proofs before it got printed. I remember thinking "Oh my goodness, they missed so much of the richness that I had in the original!" And I felt that way strongly and I went to my studio to grab the original and I grabbed the reproduction by mistake… Which meant they must have done a pretty good job because it actually tricked me. So when I thought it was very far off, it wasn't actually that far off.

However, certain qualities may still be lost in the process of mechanical reproduction:

> What happened in the original, because I'm scratching actually a bit of three dimensionality to it, and that's hard to reproduce. So the publishers really try hard to get all those layers and not just the top layer. They want to make sure they get the bottom layer and the middle layer. So sometimes I felt like it was a little thin on the top level because they were trying to get that depth but in reality you have to really see the original to know the difference and of course they could never reproduce that.

> John's physical process of painting multiple washes over the background then sanding into the surface and revealing layers of different colors underneath results in a uniquely textured surface. Looking closely, one can see the wood-like appearance of the

painting. The scratches are often more visible towards the edge of the page, contributing to framing the image. Juana paints on handmade, textured paper whose grain can sometimes be seen on the page. Hyewon's mix-media art draws attention to the different qualities of the art media, whether watercolor, crayon, colored pencils, or stamps, in creating shapes and lines. With Floyd, embracing imperfection and leaving a degree of unfinishedness in the art is one way to point toward the act of human creation.

Even the loss in materiality between the original artwork and the printed page can be turned into an additional way for artists to engage with their audience when they show their originals. John explained:

[When] I do school visits, I bring in the original art for some of the kids to see. I want them to see the real paintings, the real art, this art was from the book, that they can make that connection and that's another aspect that I do believe [in]. I'm a big advocate for art education
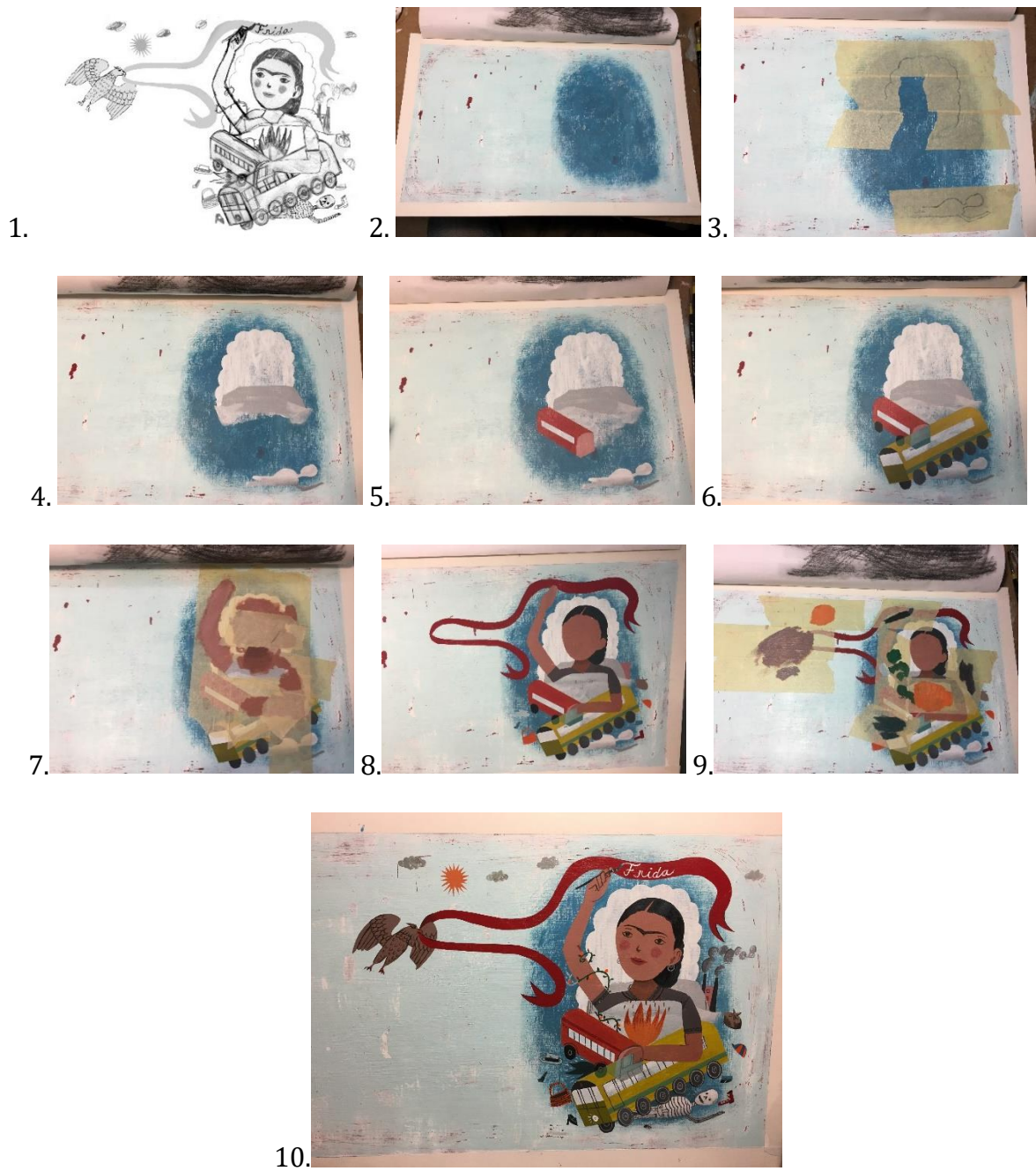
Figure 16: A demonstration John Parra's process. Images courtesy of the artist.

Responding to Genres

There are different ways to define genres and one text may belong to multiple genres simultaneously. In children's picture books, a genre can be defined in relation to the target age range, whether the text is fiction or nonfiction, and whether it is primarily narrative, informational, instructional, or poetic. Each type comes with a certain set of expectations. Although postmodern picture books, crossover books, graphic novels and other genre-blending texts are challenging the usual generic categorization, the majority of picture books for children fit into existing grouping and can be 'named' relatively easily. All of the participating artists have worked with different types of texts and their handling tends to be congruent with the commonsense expectations for a particular genre.

As an example, board books are for very young children and are characterized by simple language and shapes. Brian's signature scratchboard technique was used in *Pretty Brown Face*, written by Andrea Davis Pinkney, a book for children up to three years old, but the resulting image is very different from his works for older readers (Figure 3). Here, characters and objects are clearly outlined in black, the figures are filled with flat colors against a plain background. Only a few figures are on each page, echoing the few words present. The uncluttered, straightforward look makes it easy to focus.

Illustrated poetry often involves creating one image for each poem rather than a set of sequential images. Therefore, the artists can choose to focus on one aspect of the poem, such as the mood, setting, one of the scenes, one or some of the characters, and offer a personal interpretation. Floyd said that he often tries to mobilize a central visual metaphor in his illustration of poetry. In *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes* (1994), it was the metaphor of wind that blows through Hughes's homeland. John's illustration of the

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poem *The Captive* introduces a number of symbols that are not mentioned in the text, communicating a personal reading.

> So in a sense, this image, you see a little bit of the camp in the background, and then the barbwire is sort of like trying to wrap around her leg and keep her down but she won't be kept down. She has these wings. I don't know if in Asian culture there's this moth and the butterfly and this symbolism about transforming or sailing [...]. And there's the heart and the justice, where is the justice within your heart and within what you believe.

When Juana received the manuscript for *La Madre Goose* (2016), besides the usual approach, she managed to integrate a personal motivation into it:

> My agent and I thought that it would show a good range between animals and people. It will almost be like having a portfolio piece, because we have people and we have animals, and we have babies, and we have grown-ups, and we have elderly people, grandmas. So it will be a nice way to have a book that will show all of the things that I could possibly do for all the books.

Whether a book is nonfiction or fiction carries an expectation for factual accuracy. Nonfiction often demands an extensive research process and more attention to verisimilitude (such as in how a character, a place is rendered). John explained his approach:

> The first step I do when beginning a project is researching for visual photo references, first through the web, then in books in my library. I tend to look for images not just about the main subject but also in its regional geography, architecture, plants, animals, and anything else that could be related and connected

to the issue. I then may delve in and read historical and background info through

articles and books. Sometimes there is a good documentary on the topic to gain

some insight as well. If possible, speaking to someone with firsthand knowledge of

the subject can also bring a wealth of ideas. To me it is very important to be true to

the source material when working on a project. I feel blessed to be creating this art,

but it is a responsibility to accurately portray the content, otherwise you might fall

into stereotypes or misleading subject matters. (quoted in Weaver, 2015, para. 5)

Narratives are the most popular type of picture books, and it raises a host of unique

issues. The practices in the rest of this section are most relevant to this type of text,

although some could be found in other genres.

Case Study: John Parra's *Marvelous Cornelius*

Cornelius Washington was a sanitation worker in New Orleans. He was popular for

his lively, charismatic personality and passion for his job. During Hurricane Katrina, he was

among those that led the effort to clean up the city. His effort was reported on the news and

caught the attention of the author. Cornelius Washington passed away a few years ago.

The book opens with the front matter featuring a row of colorful buildings and a

garbage truck. The first spread introduces readers to the main character. If there is any

doubt, the word New Orleans on the page provides instant confirmation.

John likes biographies, tall tales and folk heroes. The story about Cornelius

Washington, who actually lived and worked in New Orleans, was told in this way: "you take

a character who might have really lived but it's like you make it into this larger than life,

exaggeration in a sense,'' he said. The first image portrays Cornelius towering in size,

echoing the 'larger than life', 'tall tale' effect. Another reason has to do with visualizing the character's personality.

So I wanted to iconically frame him in a way. It's almost like a backdrop; it's almost like he's on a stage with the backdrop painting. (...) In the story, in the book, he's really kind of a performer. He's this sort of extrovert, I'm trying to think of the word. Everybody knew him in his neighborhood. He was friendly. He was a sanitation worker but when he picked up the garbage, he would throw the bag behind his head. It was almost like an artist, a performer.

A children's book generally takes John seven or eight months to complete. To prepare, he looked at images of the location, pictures of the people that appear in the book; he even researched the food, the music, the plants. "So I have just like stacks and stacks of photos and pictures and research and reading and reading," he told me. He compared this phrase to an actor going into the role. "This is all very important you know. You want to make it feel right. You have to make it feel right, because people are gonna see it, people who are from that area..."

In this book, the sense of place is communicated in a few different ways. St. Louis Cathedral, a landmark in the city, appears throughout the book and serves as an anchor for the scene. John took the liberty to remove most of the trees around Jackson Square, leaving the white church and its three towers clearly visible. Different parts of the city were painted: the busy French Quarter, an empty street, a bird's eye view from across the river-- with the church still visible to help readers orient themselves. The architectural style is distinctly New Orleans, and John was careful to include a diverse range of people, food, and musical instruments.

One thing I missed during my first reading of the book was the recurring red umbrella that appears throughout the book. Once I was made aware, it became a game to look for the hidden umbrella. Sometimes it is held by a background character; other times only the handle is visible from a full trash can. The inspiration for it came from a French movie he had watched called *The Red Balloon.*

It's about a little boy who finds this red balloon, it follows this little boy in Paris. And then in the end the boy accepts the balloon because the balloon is very persistent and it's kind of following the boy around. Then eventually the other kids in the neighborhood, they don't like it and then they destroy the balloon. It's kinda sad. It's an old movie but it's very interesting. There's no words really. Then at the end all these balloons across Paris come to the boy.

The red color of the umbrella in the book is a nod to that movie, but the umbrella itself, which offers protection from the rain, is thematically related to the story about hurricane and becomes a symbol for resilience and recovery.

Other times, small details that John hides within the text are not necessarily meaningful to the story being told. A specific building was painted to recreate the building that his brother took him to visit when he came to New Orleans for the first time. A background character was painted in his brother's likeness in his Air Force uniform. John also included himself as a little boy in all his books, but he would not tell me which. This running gag was inspired by Al Hirschfeld who used to hide the name of his daughter, Nina, in his artwork. The goal is not to be found out, but the goal is to play a little game.

I'm just gonna hide myself in all my books somewhere and people can find it or not

find it or whatever but it's fun. (...) And I think if I am having fun doing it then people

are going to get that energy and that fun reading it you know?

Details like these became little inside jokes, provided a glimpse behind the scenes into the

artistic process and created a particular kind of intimacy between the artist and his

readers. They are one way he claims and makes use of the 'space' and freedom afforded to

him as an artist.

Creating a Visual Narrative

    Interpreting the story. Illustrators may have an overall interpretation or 'vision' of

a text that informs their approach and use of storytelling techniques. In *Marvelous Cornelius*

(2015), John's interpretation of the story (as a biography of a folk hero figure) and the

character (an ordinary person with charisma who did his job as an artist and community

leader) directly influenced the way he created the images. Juana approached *Fry Bread: A*

Native American Family Story (2019) from an anti-colonialist perspective with an

expressed goal to counter existing stereotypes about Native Americans. She named three

common associations that people tend to have about Native Americans: they are stuck in

the past; they only live on reservations; and they are all brown and set out to address each

of them:

I added tattoos to the parents because we're here, we have tattoos. I mean that's a

way for me to bring them back to this time. And I don't want to put them in a

reservation because that's limited. I wanted to make it more of an urban setting,

everyday, regular family that is getting together. They don't have to be poor, they

don't have to be all these things. You could gently include... Or the fact that they're

all brown while Native Americans could be white, or black, or Asian-looking, right? So that's what's important for me to also include, that they don't all look one way; they're not the typical brown, braided hair, feathers. And that's how you break the stereotype, gently, I think.

Situating the story in time and space. The story of *Marvelous Cornelius* (2015) has a clear setting and time, New Orleans before, during, and briefly after Hurricane Katrina. The challenge was to portray New Orleans in a convincing and interesting way. Many other stories do not have the exact location clued in the text, which opens up the freedom for illustrators to either place them in a specific time and space rich with meaning or keep it minimal and introduce ambiguity. Juana's decision to place *Frybread* (2019) in a contemporary urban setting was deliberate and political. This was achieved, "gently", through strategic inclusion of details. Her locating *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) in a culturally specific place also came from a similar commitment.

It's something that I always see, being from Peru. It's very easy to stereotype what being Peruvian means. People stereotype because they write from a point of romanticized view of what it means to be Peruvian. The default is that people from Cusco, and then they have Machu Picchu in mind, and they have llamas and alpacas. But Peru is so much more than that. Even within Cusco there are so many different villages and each one will have completely different clothing, completely different color palettes, their blankets will be different, their hats will be different, the way they wear their hats will be different. And that's something that is lost very often.

That was why she symbolically placed the story in Huilloc in the mountains of the province of Cusco, and la princesa, who is passing through the village, wears clothing inspired by people from the Colca Canyon in the province of Arequipa.

Other times, the choice is motivated by the emotional or narrative content of the story and how that may best be communicated. Hyewon's books show a wide range of treatment toward the setting. Some stories, such as *The Twins' Blanket* (2011) or *Mom, It's the First Day of Kindergarten* (2012), use an abundance of white space; there are only enough details to suggest if the location is indoors or outdoors, at home, on the street, or at school. The focus is on the characters' facial expressions and body language. Time is often established visually through background and details, so white space and minimal details may evoke a sense of timelessness. In *A Piece of Home* (2016), however, the main character, Hee Jun, has to move from Korea to the U.S. with his family. The background takes on an important role to highlight the drastically different environment he now has to handle: the new house, the new classroom, the different dining table. As he adjusts to the change, the background takes on a warmer, more vibrant tone. In the end, the mugunghwa bushes blooming in their backyard, just like they did in their old garden, signals that the family has made a new home.

Meaningful colors. Color is a powerful resource for meaning. The participating artists show at least four ways of using colors: establish tone and mood, create cohesion, evoke cultural meanings, and express emotions.

Colors can be used to establish the tone for the story—cheerful or calming, fun or solemn, lyrical and dreamy or humorous or realistic. Vibrant but soft and cozy colors are a good match for *La Madre Goose* (2016), a rhyming book for very young children. Sepia-

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tone, grainy images tend to evoke the feelings of old photographs and films. This association makes Floyd's art particularly suited for stories about the past, something he has actively embraced. Juana also made use of a similar effect in *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (2018). As she described it herself:

> In *Alma*, I wanted the feel of an old family photo album. Most of those old photos are sepia and black-and-white so it was a deliberate, easy choice. Adding the pink and blue to the work was a way to differentiate between the story that is happening in the present, and the old photos placed in the album.

Here the color also functions rhetorically as a signposting and cohesive device. In some cases, culturally significant colors could add an extra level of depth and interest to the image. Juana deliberately wanted *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) to be a red book and in the specific shade of red from the indigenous people from Huilloc, Cusco. John's *Frida Kahlo* (2017) features her famous *azul* color predominantly.

The power of colors to evoke emotion is well-known. There are some conventional associations—red with passion and energy, blue with calmness, green with nature and so on. The associations are not always fixed and can be used creatively. In Hyewon's *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten*! (2012), blue suggests anxiety while orange-red indicates energy and confidence. The first page has the child bright and big standing over his mother, tiny and blue under her blanket. As she is reassured by her child and sees him confidently starting his day at the 'big kids' school', she becomes larger and more colorful. Just as the original blue fades, intensifies and combines with other colors, readers are made aware of the swift waves of feelings that the character goes through. Toward the end of the story, the boy has a moment of panic. We see him shrink in size and take on a tinge of blue as his

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mother looks on reassuringly. Around them, other children and parents are also wearing varying shades of blue. The uncluttered pages with a lot of white space further emphasize the colors present. The visual representation of emotion is both empathetic and effective.

Secondary stories, Easter eggs and intertextuality. Graham (2014) has said of this special affordance of the picture book: Pictures may show what the text indicates, but there may also be "a secondary story, a running gag, a surreal embroidering, incongruity, ambiguity and irony, even in books aimed at the youngest audience" (p. 55). With the participating artists, this gap between what the word says and what it neither says nor disallows becomes a place for play, experimentation, further plot development and so on. The 'gap' is where a particular kind of illustrator's freedom is exercised.

Juana, who has expressed her liking for character-driven stories, is deliberate in using this space to add layers of secondary characters and stories. In *Babymoon* (2019), a story about a young family welcoming its newest member, the collective pronoun "we" is never explained. It is intuitive to include a mother and a father, but Juana also added to this family a dog and a cat, who "are all part of the story, as important as everybody is". She has done similarly in *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017). Besides the main characters, the queen, her son and the princess, Juana pretty much had the freedom to build the supporting cast. The cat she added proves to be an interesting running character as it goes through its own process of character development. As an extension of the queen, it was suspicious and grumpy, but by the end as happy and content as she is. The animals, including chicken, guinea pigs, donkeys, llamas add liveliness and flavor to the story besides enhancing a sense of place. This, however, is not simply a practical strategy to enhance the text. It is also a space for the artist to have fun. As Juana explained: "I just think the way I approach my

work is I do things to keep myself entertained. I think if I keep myself entertained, I will keep the children entertained."

John also makes frequent use of this technique. Whether it is the red umbrella hidden in the story about Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, a reference to a Frida's painting in the book about the artist and her animals, incorporating a personally significant landmark, or hiding himself and his family and friends on the page, these details enrich readers' engagement with the book.

Writing AND Illustrating

Four of the participating artists have published books that they both wrote and illustrated; John was in the process of writing one at the time of the interview. This section, which I did not anticipate at the beginning of the project, presents a case study of Juana's author-illustrator debut picture book and summarizes key characteristics of the author-illustrator experience. It does not aim to present a thorough account of this unique process and is meant to be an exploratory attempt.

Case Study: Juana's *Alma and How She Got Her Name*

Alma is a picture book about a girl with a long name, Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela. "It never fits," she tells her father. He then tells her about people in their family whose names are part of hers: her grandmother Sofia, who loved books and flowers, her great-grandmother Esperanza, who wanted to travel, her grandfather José, who was an artist, her great-aunt Pura, and her other grandmother Candela. Each name comes with a story. And Alma? That name was picked just for her, so one day she will have her own story to tell.

This book was written and illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal who was born Juana Carlota Martinez Pizarro, a name she was not very fond of when growing up. Juana's story about how this book came along, while not necessarily typical, raises interesting issues about the act of creating and how the words and pictures come together. It was the result of a long process:

> I was chasing this idea of the book, but I couldn't quite get it done because I didn't have the tools to get it, I didn't have the words. Even the way I drew wasn't... the way I framed the story wasn't quite there. So I kept chasing the story. It was a constant for years. By the time Alma was published, it was 8 years since I started the idea of Alma.

The inspiration for her book came from a personal place: a big photo album of her extended family that she put together with pictures collected from her parents, some of which they had received from their parents or got passed down from even earlier generations. "Every time I looked at the photo album, my head filled with many questions. Who were they? What did they love? What made them who they were?" (quoted in Sorell, 2018, para. 32). One day she started drawing some of these photographs and the story of a girl with a long name through learning about her own family through those names began. But it was not until 2013 when her daughter was born, did she return to the story.

> I came back to the story and began to talk to my agent about it. Her son is named after his great grandfather and he is the fourth generation with his name. We began talking about our children's names and how all children–really everyone–has a story behind their name. Then the story grew from there! (quoted in Sorell, 2018, para 36)

The autobiographical elements are extensive and embedded in the book, interwoven with the story of Alma. Juana did not keep all of their exact names but she carefully selected names that represent the essence of her relatives. Even the look of the characters was based on their real-life counterparts. Esperanza, meaning 'hope', is Alma's great-grandmother, who wished to travel but never left the city she was born. Her son is a sailor who travels the world. Esperanza was based on Juana's own maternal great-grandmother, who she used to call Tota. Her son, Juana's great uncle, died at sea and his body was never found. In the book, Esperanza is shown seated in a chair, surrounded by letters and artifacts from around the world. She never left home but got to visit all these strange lands through her son's gifts.

Going back and diving deep into the lives of these family members proved to be a challenging emotional experience.

The story is framed by Alma talking with her daddy. I am also very close to my dad, and spent many hours talking with him and my mom about the stories of our family. It was a very intense time. While writing and revising, I could only take one story at a time before I was sobbing. Funny enough, as I found myself crying, I started to realize that I had gotten to that place where I needed to be to tell my story. (quoted in Sorell, 2018, para 43)

Alma is Peruvian, Juana emphasized. There is no explicit mention of Peru (although the names have a distinctive Latinx flair), and I would not have made that connection on my own as a casual reader of the book. Juana, however, said she tried to show Peruvian way of being through carefully selected details:

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Alma and How She Got Her Name is all about being Peruvian—from showing the mix

of traditional religion and Indigenous beliefs (that I absolutely believe), to living in a

politically unstable country, to valuing or sadly not valuing our own Indigenous

people. (quoted in Sorell, 2018, para 48)

The book was published by Candlewick Press simultaneously in both Spanish and

English, and Juana wrote both versions.

Being Author-Illustrator

Many artists start out as illustrators before writing and illustrating their own books.

Even after publishing as an author-illustrator, they may continue to illustrate texts written

by others. Therefore, author-illustrator as an identity can be fluid and complicated. Floyd

said that he sees himself primarily as an artist; writing is only an extension of that. Brian

also mentions thinking of himself as an artist more than an author despite having published

many books before. He struggles more with writing and needs a different kind of feedback:

It really takes me having an editor who knows how to handle me very tenderly. An

art director can be a little harsh with me and I'll still have doubt and I get recovered

in a week. If an editor questions me and I have doubt, it's going to be a month or six

months to recover.

Juana and Hyewon are more at peace with the label. Juana considered writing her

own books as a 'natural' next step in her career and Hyewon has published as an author-

illustrator more than as illustrator alone. As an immigrant writing in a second language and

a culture different from the one she grew up with, Hyewon still has her insecurities:

I always thought my English is not good enough, and I always felt I haven't read

much of American children's literature. I have read lots of books with my kids, I am

catching up. I am still afraid my English is not what I think as a writer's, but it keeps

me going. (quoted in Yeom, 2019, p. 3)

Regarding the process of creation, the process can vary widely. Floyd said he often

completes the entire text first before moving on to create the images while others often

develop the images and the text together in a sometimes lengthy and messy process. As

shown in the case study above, Juana's experience with *Alma* (2018) belongs to the second

type. Similarly, Hyewon's making of *The Twins' Blanket* (2011) had both the story and

images evolve together:

> It's very early book of mine, and I want to tell too many things at first. In the first
>
> version, there was a detailed process of making blanket and the story was set in
>
> 1980 in Seoul. Then I rewrite this story for 2 years.

Some stories come easily while others take a long time. The process can be messy

and unpredictable. Hyewon describes her process this way:

> Typical work process is like this, first have this idea, it's just idea, and I think about it
>
> for a while. My idea is coming from everywhere: my kids, sisters, friends and
>
> family. If the idea is any good, I make it a story in my head and I keep it sit there for
>
> a while. Sometimes I tell my kids about stories. Then there's pictures in my head, I
>
> try to draw characters on the paper and make thumbnail sketches and write the
>
> stories. When I think it becomes something I can show to other soul, I send it to my
>
> agent. And if he thinks it's any good, I make it to a dummy book and send it to
>
> editors. I was in school when I first started, so it's more personal. Now I worked
>
> with editors and art directors, they give me feedbacks. Then I finished the sketches

and work on the layout with art directors. Finally, I work on final art, and this is the best part.

Interestingly, for some artists, the way they create art influences the way they write. Some of Brian's art making process transfers into how he writes. In particular, as he makes multiple versions of the same image and selects one afterwards, he does the same when writing: "I'll write it several times, and then I'll decide which one is the one that works as opposed to trying to go in and edit it".

Finally, the stories that the artists wrote are motivated by personal interests and experiences. Even when it is not autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, there are often details from the artists' personal life. After her semi-autobiographical author-illustrator debut, Juana has been working on her second book with which she hopes to present a richer way of seeing Peru, her home country. All artists still have to get their whole team and especially a publisher on board. John was in the middle of this process: "I have the outline, I've started writing it but we're still forming it. I'm working with my agents and they're helping me sort of move it in a direction and we're going to pitch it." Without a publisher's interest, the project may not be able to move forward.

CHAPTER 5: ILLUSTRATING DIVERSITY

Diverse and Multicultural Literature and the Language of Diversity

Defining Diverse and Multicultural Literature

In a narrow sense, multicultural literature refers to multiracial and multiethnic literature. This remains the most popular association. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), for example, defines the term as "books by and about people of color and First/Native Nations" (CCBC, n.d., para 2). In its tracking of multicultural books published annually since 1994 the CCBC uses four broad groupings: African/African American, American Indians/First Nations, Asian Pacifics/Asian Pacific Americans and Latinx. Prior to 1994, the CCBC only tracked the number of books by black authors and illustrators against the estimated number of total books published, reflecting an even narrower original interest.

A more expanded definition includes a variety of other markers of social differences such as sexuality, religion, class, disability, language, and family structure. The list may get longer or shorter depending on contexts and specific interests of the people involved. We Need Diverse Books, a grassroot movement that advocates for literature that "reflects and honors the lives of all young people" (para. 1) defines diversity broadly as experiences "including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities" (We Need Diverse Books, n.d., para. 3).

The most inclusive definition asserts that "all literature is multicultural" (Fishman, 1995, p. 79) and that it is possible to engage with cultural issues in any work. Multiculturalism becomes a lens to analyze issues of power and representation whether in

relation to gender, class, race or another aspect. This perspective has been criticized by some scholars as diluting the focus and weakening the social justice goals of multicultural literature. Cai (1998) argues:

> Multicultural literature is still a much-needed, separate category of literature. Its existence also poses a challenge to the domination of all-white literature. Eventually, multicultural literature will cease to exist and the world of children's books becomes one of democratic pluralism. But we still have a long way to go before we realize that goal. (p. 11)

This view articulates another important assumption about multicultural and diverse literature: these are works with the potential power to disrupt and intervene into the monopoly of the mainstream culture and their existence as a separate category is a necessary step toward a fully inclusive future. Sims Bishop (1992) explicitly defines diverse literature as "literature by and about people who are members of groups considered to be outside the sociopolitical mainstream of the United States" (p. 39). Because the dominant culture in the U.S. is identified to be white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, patriarchal, English speaking, abled, and middle class, any group other than that can be included under the umbrella of multicultural, diverse literature. Books with strong female characters, for example, are regularly included although statistically women are not a minority. As race remains among the most salient concerns in contemporary U.S., many find that a focus on "people of color" in literature is justified. Junko Yokota (2001) clarifies this continued privileging of racial and ethnic diversity:

> It is not that people of color deserve more or less attention than people of other cultural groups. Rather, a focus on ethnicity-related issues in literature allows us to

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consider the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural issues shared by ethnic groups that lie outside the mainstream. I am not proposing an exclusionary attitude toward other kinds of cultural diversity. Rather, broadening our perspective on diversity overall is important. But it is also important to recognize that different kinds of diversity are not necessarily parallel in their issues and that although some issues affecting a range of diverse groups are the same or at least similar, others are quite different. (p. xiv)

In summary, the scope of diverse and multicultural literature is malleable and can be mobilized very differently in different contexts. While most people support making it more inclusive, many others actively advocate against including the 'mainstream' culture. Racial and ethnic differences continue to be the primary concern.

Diversity Problems in Children's Book Publishing

In September 2016, Sarah Park Dahlen posted on her website an infographic created by illustrator David Huyck in consultation with Molly Beth Griffin based on the annual multicultural publishing statistics tracked by the CCBC. In June 2019 she posted an updated version. These infographics have been widely circulated, not only online but also as postcards and in various print materials. Being visual, it communicates unambiguously the underrepresentation of character from 'diverse backgrounds', with 'diverse backgrounds' specifically referring to four major groups of racial and ethnic minorities in the US. Both versions use the size of the mirror to indicate the relative proportion of books about each group; the 2019 version added cracks in the mirrors for minority children, a deliberate decision to show "not just the low quantity of existing literature, but also the inaccuracy and uneven quality of some of those books" (School Library Journal, 2019, para 3).

Figure 17: Infographics about diversity in children's books in 2015 (Huyck, Dahlen, & Griffin, 2016) and 2018 (Huyck & Dahlen, 2019).

Besides problematic representation in published children's books as a whole, underrepresentation also exists within each genre or topic. Talking about "the apartheid of children's literature", Christopher Myers (2014) bemoans the fact that "characters of color are limited to the townships of occasional historical books that concern themselves with the legacies of civil rights and slavery but are never given a pass card to traverse the lands of adventure, curiosity, imagination or personal growth" (para. 6). Similarly, Cai (1994), among others, has noted the over-representation of folk tales among books about Asian Americans. Stories about Native Americans often associate them with rural areas, native lands and traditional cultural values and customs; few of them are seen living in cities, working as professionals, or interacting with other ethnicities (Williams, 2012). This typecasting further reinforces the segregation between groups of people.

Bishop (1990) has famously and explicitly spoken about the danger of the lack of and problematic representations: When children cannot find appropriate and positive images of themselves in books, they learn that they are not valued in their society. She proposed three metaphors, 'mirror', 'window', 'sliding glass door' about the possible relationship with books:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. (p. ix)

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Concerns about representation within children's books are also linked to concerns about who are participating in the publishing industry. The CCBC has tracked both books by and books about people of color from the beginning. Superimposing the racial and ethnic background of the characters and the authors and illustrators, the CCBC statistics combine concerns about representations in books and representations in the industry. Commenting on the statistics from 2014, Le & Low Books (2015) notes that "It's disconcerting that more than half the books about people of color were created by cultural outsiders" (para. 7).
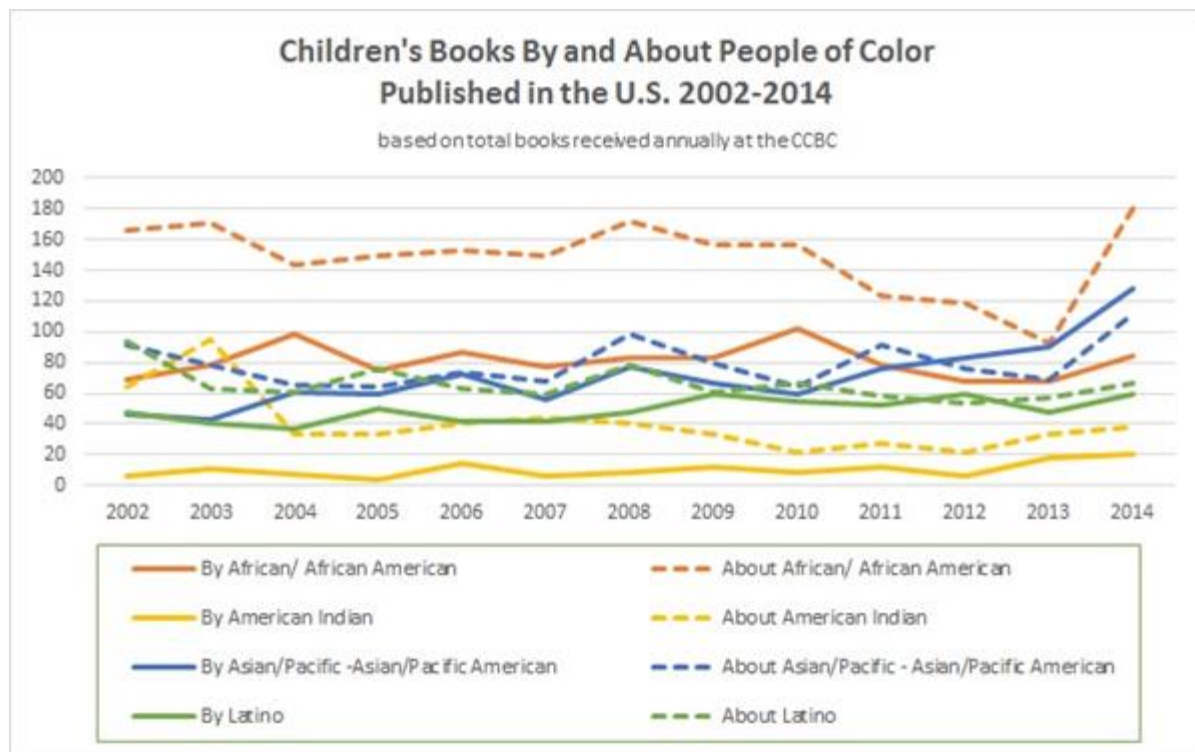

Figure 18: Cooperative Children's Book Center, Books by and about people of color published in the U.S. 2002-2014.

The other part of the industry, including board and executive members, editors, marketers, salespeople, and reviewers, also shows lack of diversity, which could intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate the disparity.

Illustrators and the Language of Diversity

Diversity as lived experiences, motivation, and resource. In his acceptance speech at the 2018 Pura Belpré award, John Parra talked about a personal project to map his family history. He started with his father's parents who migrated from Mexico to the US through El Paso, Texas and worked as migrant farm workers traveling up and down the state. His mother's family came from Slovakia and settled in Pennsylvania, working as farmers and coal miners.

> Throughout this process memories began to seep in. I remembered the tamales my aunts made growing up, I recalled the backyard piñata parties for birthdays with cousins, and I thought of my father's parent's small farm on Pacheco Road where they raised goats, sheep, and chickens. It was just the sort of place my five-year-old self wanted to explore. It is many of these memories, stories, and histories that influence my art today.

It is a common theme among the participating artists: diversity is their personal, lived experiences that then become part of their work. Growing up in Santa Barbara, California in a multicultural family among a diverse group of friends, John said it was only natural that he wanted to show that in his books:

> We were all just people, we didn't consider ourselves this or that, but we were all diverse, our backgrounds. So for me to see faces in my books that represent all my friends and all my family is important.

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In a similar way, Brian's inspiration for his books, especially those that he wrote, comes from his own life. *Max Found Two Sticks* (1994) is set in Brooklyn where he lives. *On the Ball* (2015) is about himself at six years old playing soccer, and the character likely looked like him at that age. "I don't think about intellectually," he said. "Usually it comes to me what seems to be appropriate based on my experience, because the more personal it is, the more I can identify with it."

Growing in Korea and moving to the US as an adult, Hyewon experienced what it was like as an immigrant. That included observing the beauty and richness in a multicultural society which she then tries to bring into her books:

I came here and met many beautiful couples who accept each other from very different backgrounds. And they share their food, culture and raise kids together. Isn't that lovely way to break the wall between people if there are any?

That also consists of painful experiences as an immigrant. *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten* (2012) was said to be about her own anxiety as her son grows up and goes out into the world. Making books for children takes on a personal urgency:

As a first-time mom, like everybody else, every new start for the child is a struggle. But as an immigrant, you have to deal with other things. With cultural differences, establishing your child's identity (not only yours) in the community was and still is not an easy task. I am constantly conscious about who I am, and who my kids are. However, I don't want my kids to feel the way I do, it's a harrowing experience. I do think it will help kids take themselves as who they are if we see more kids who look like you represent in books, movies. You can always connect with the characters more if they look like you. (quoted in Yeom, 2019, p. 3)

Being from Peru gives Juana both insights and a mission. She said in her acceptance speech at 2018 Pura Belpré award about moving to the US: "My first impression of Los Angeles was everything related to Spanish and Latino culture centered around Mexico, and there was no room for other Latin American stories". *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) became an opportunity to tell a counter story:

> I wanted to show the people from Cusco removed from the stereotypes that often plague them in books, art, and movies. Instead I wanted to show the subtleties of their way of life. The reason why I fell in love with them and my country of Peru. I wanted to show the warmth, the open spaces, the activity of the towns, the amazing craft they pass on from generation to generation. I want-ed to give readers a chance to get dizzy with the oranges, reds, and blacks that fill the ponchos, llikllas, skirts, chullos, hats, and monteras they weave and wear every day in Huilloc. I wanted to show the unevenness of the dirt roads that lead us into the homes and fields they inhabit. I wanted to share their full quality of life and not only a postcard view of life in Peru.

Her later works have continued to advance a different version of Peru in books.

Diversity in children's literature. All participants expressed trust in the power of books and art to make a positive difference in the life of children and bring people together. Books can give "kids a positive alternative to counteract the negative impact of what is conveyed in today's media", write Floyd on his personal website. Hyewon talked about the normalizing power of visual images: "if we see more of multicultural images in the picture books, we might take them more easily and naturally".

As discussed earlier, the scope of diverse, multicultural literature can vary. The five illustrators show two different ways of defining. Hyewon used 'underrepresented voice' to define diverse books, taking the moderate position along the spectrum of inclusive and exclusive definitions discussed earlier: "[i]f the books deal with different voices under-represented before, it could be [considered] diverse/multicultural books". Juana used the same word as a deliberate choice and elaborated:

If somebody asks me, somebody that has nothing to do with kidlit, like my dentist: "What do you do?". I am a Latinx author and illustrator who makes books that center on underrepresented groups. I like the use of 'underrepresented', not 'marginalized'. I prefer 'underrepresented' because that's what we are, we are underrepresented. I don't feel, I don't see Alma as marginalized, I never will. She's just a happy girl that happens to be Latina. I don't see the couple in *Babymoon* as marginalized either. I don't see the family in *Frybread* as marginalized. I refuse to accept that's what they are.

John exemplified an inclusive and celebratory approach towards diversity, emphasizing the coming together of many types of differences.

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I'm about bringing people together, so when speaking about diversity, some people

think diversity is when you're here, you're there and we're going to market to each

one of you separately. No, I don't want that. I want it to be inclusiveness, I want it to

be, we're a family of many colors, a family of different backgrounds, we're coming

together and finding interesting ways to show all of us together.

Brian refused to limit the scope of 'diversity' despite being fully aware of its

common usage:

The word 'diverse' means many, so you can't be specific about many varieties,

differences. I think the reason why we define it as diverse is because there are books

that are still monolithic, monocultural, whatever, white American let's say, that we

assume that is the norm, because most books are that way. Then we're trying to

categorize books that aren't as diverse, and then we want to figure out, how do we

make sure that people know those books aren't like those other books.

Diversity language as imperfect, changing and necessary.

When you say diverse, it's diverse by what standards? (...) I mean diverse for whom?

And it somehow defaults into the white gaze. (...) I mean this is my life, right?

There's nothing diverse about it. It's just my every day.

Juana took issue with the term 'diverse' itself. 'Multicultural' also felt problematic to

her although she used to use that label for her work when she was getting started: "But I

don't do it anymore and I think it's all about you know, we evolve, our ways of thinking

evolve, and the way we approach our work changes too." As mentioned above, she rejected

the word 'marginalized' to describe her characters or her own group. Similar language,

such as 'dominated' or 'oppressed' has been criticized by researchers and educators as it sets up power as a simple and one directional force.

Brian said he prefer the term 'diverse' over 'multicultural' "just because I think that's the word that's being used more now. (...) And in 10 years there may be a problem with 'diverse'". This changing language does not bother him, however.

I think we're trying to find the language it's because we know that it's important to have them. We want to make sure they don't go away. So that's why we're trying to find the language. The language isn't designed to limit our books; it's for people to identify what they are. So I see both sides of the discussion. And I think we need both sides of the discussion because it makes the conversation continue.

In addition, grappling with the politics of labeling, the artists pointed out the way a group label can mislead and obscure diversity. Latino, for example, is a broad label for many different cultures. John reflected on his experience of painting the U.S. Post Office's Delicioso Forever Stamps to celebrate Latino food cuisine:

People think oh, Latino food, you mean Mexican food? No, I mean Latino food, like Caribbean, like different food from Central America, South America. (...) That was a conversation we had when we were working on the stamps. We wanted to represent Latino, many different countries and cultures within the Latino community. I come from a Mexican background, but my wife is Puerto Rican and her aesthetic and certain words or food is different, you know.

Even a narrower label, Mexican, has the same problem as there is no one single Mexican culture. Along the same line, Brian talked about the diversity of the African American experience: "is it inner city, is it rural?" In addition, when naming a character as

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African American, "then all of a sudden, we're excluding Caribbean Americans, or Africans, or some others with the color of the book character but not the setting."

The struggle with the limitations of group labels points to the reductionist impact of any grouping and the tension between individual and group-based differences. There is always heterogeneity within a group and diversity evades the language that seeks to manage it. To solve this tension, the artists seem to move from one label to another depending on context. As mentioned before, Juana often introduced herself as a Latinx author-illustrator to people outside of the field. In communication with people inside the field, however, she referred to herself as Peruvian. She uses 'Peruvian' on her website. John describes his books as 'Latinx themed', his cultural heritage as 'Hispanic' and his inspiration include 'Mexican murals'.

Summary and Discussion - The Language of Diversity

"Few words in the current American lexicon are as ubiquitous and ostensibly uplifting as diversity," Hartman and Bell (2007, p. 895) wrote. Studying how ordinary Americans talked about diversity, they reported that respondents tend to talk about diversity in general, abstract, positive but underdeveloped ways. Although their list of social differences that fall under the umbrella of diversity is extensive, their concrete references primarily focus on racial experiences. There are often tensions between 'happy talk' and complicated reality of dealing with differences and tensions between two contradictory notions of diversity (as individualism and as group-level identity).

The participating artists in this study primarily referenced racial and ethnic experiences when discussing diversity, which reflects the dominant conception of diversity. Their discussion indicates efforts to grapple with the inadequacy of the language of

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diversity. Their language did not suggest an assimilationist assumption but did point toward some common, universal points that different people should share.

Illustrating Diversity

How do illustrators make visible different ways of being? This section describes the three modes of participation through which illustrators accomplish that. The pedagogical mode refers to the intentional, deliberate act of making art to communicate a particular message, idea, or lesson to an audience. The artistic mode is when the illustrators act not on the basis of a predetermined goal but through a process of experimentation and discovery. The interpersonal mode highlights how who they are personally makes a difference. An artist may have a preferred or primary mode of working but the creation and impact of a particular book is often the combined result of all three modes. Untangling them may make it easier to see the multiple ways to engage with an illustrator' work.

Interpersonal Mode of Participation

As stated earlier the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) defines diverse books as books by and about people of color and First/Native Nations. As 'by people of color' is an inherent part of the definition, every single book made by the participating artists can be considered 'diverse' as a result of who they are demographically. This identity politics can raise complicated feelings: Many participants struggle with the word 'diverse' and group labels. Identity is also not a guarantee of quality.

Yet, through being recognized in the industry, they have been able to create books, connect with others in the field, and mentor other artists. Many became authors and tell stories of their own. This process contributes to the industry as a whole. In addition, illustrators are often brought into school and the curriculum. They often have channel to

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communicate directly with their readers. Autobiographical details from their life become resources for meaning making with their books.

Pedagogical Mode of Representation – Deliberate Treatment of Characters and Settings

Artists sometimes have representational intents in mind, which can be realized through storytelling strategies. Of the five artists, Juana embraces an intellectual, critical approach to her representational practice:

I think the way I approach the subject is from the view of not less but more, from the idea that they are rich. They have so many different things. They are rich cultures and rich people just by being who they are, instead of oh this poor brown family, or these poor Indigenous people, they have nothing. So that's the way I frame my book, from the approach of more, of rich, of fully fledged humans.

This approach influences a range of representational strategies that she may use, such as being conscious of and avoiding negative stereotypes, adding details that are less known outside of the cultural group.

A detailed discussion of storytelling practices, including interpreting the story and developing characters, situating the story in time and space, using colors strategically, and introducing secondary stories, Easter eggs or intertextuality, can be found in Chapter 4. Below I review and expand on a number of specific techniques used by the participants and consider how they may show social differences.

Diversifying background characters. Whenever there is a group of people, artists could vary their appearance (skin tones, clothing, hair colors, gestures…) to hint at racial or ethnic differences, disability, relationship status and family structure. This simple technique is non-invasive and easily compatible with a variety of stories. In the image below from Hyewon's *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten* (2012), the mother is nervously waiting to pick up her son from his first day in kindergarten. She can be seen next to both men and women donning different types of clothing (including a woman in what appears to be a hijab) and hairstyles.

This technique helps normalizing diversity through superficial, visible differences and gestures toward a multicultural society. It also comes with the risk of tokenism and showing diversity as only the background to the story of people from a dominant group.

Figure 19: An image from Hyewon Yum's *Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarte*n! (2012). Image courtesy of the artist.

Slightly more sophisticated is to have a multicultural cast who also participate in the story. Hyewon spoke about 'smuggling' in some mystery by depicting the mother and daughter differently in *Saturday Is Swimming Day* (2018):

The girl is Asian looking, and her mom is blond women. I intentionally made that

way, since I want to show there's all kinds of family: maybe she's adopted, maybe

she's a stepchild, maybe she is biracial kid. And readers recognized it right away.

Notably, this technique alone is not enough for the book to be counted in the CCBC

statistics as they tend to err on the side of being more conservative. As explained on their

website:

We do not count a book if the principal character is White and there are a range of

secondary characters, including characters of color, but none of the characters of

color seem to play a significant role. This is, of course, somewhat subjective; we

discuss as a staff books that we can't easily discern. We do not want to misrepresent

a book as having multicultural content; likewise, we make every effort not to miss

those that do. (CCBC, 2019, para. 3)

Developing the main characters - Bodily presence and back stories. Except for biographies, in which illustrators need to maintain resemblance between the characters and how they look in real life, the artists can often largely decide the specific look of the characters. This is a type of gap that allows the artist to exercise their freedom beyond explicit descriptive details in the text. *Babymoon* (2019)*,* a story about a young family welcoming their first child, makes no mention of the characters' appearance. Juana cast the couple as brown-skinned, a choice that did not go unnoticed. A review of the story mentions "the lighter-skinned father" and the "brown-skinned mother, framed by long, puffy hair" (Kirkus Review, 2019). The text does not contain explicitly marked cultural themes otherwise.

In stories that presuppose diverse characters, characterization could look very different depending on the artists' way of working. Floyd often finds real models and photographs them in various poses or expressions. Based on real people, portrayed in a realistic and emotionally expressive manner, his characters feel real and convincing; their particularities stand out. On the other hand, the cartoon is the art of simplifying and removing details, so it gives the artist a different set of tools. Juana marked her character Alma by incorporating specific objects and including themes significant to Peruvians; Alma's look itself does not point toward a specific ethnicity. When portraying a Seminole family in Frybread, she intentionally avoided the brown skin, braided hair, and feathers imagery and gave the character tattoos in Seminole patterns to both signal their cultural background and to thicken their backstory. Brian's impressionistic paintings can make racial reading based on the look of the character alone rather tenuous. This ambiguity can

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be productive and serves as another salient example of the need for complex and theoretically informed reading of picture book illustrations.

Settings - Culturally marked or minimal and hybridity. Setting can be a way to support characterization but locating a story in a specific space by itself could be a politically significant act. In the history of children's literature, Ezra Jack Keats's portrayal of Peter's urban neighborhood contributed a new landscape for childhood beyond the common idyllic rural and suburban setting of the time. Juana talked about choosing the location for *La Princesa and the Pea* (2017) as the turning point in her relationship to the story and how she found a way to go beyond the "stereotype and romanticized view" commonly attached to Peru:

> When I first began working on the book, the first character sketches felt flat and lacked life. In my first sketches I had created European royalty of princes and princesses, which I didn't care about nor understand, having been born and raised in Peru. (...) I re-casted Princesa as a girl from the Colca Valley in Arequipa. The story finally started to make sense in the book. The people from Huilloc are famous for their weavings; the women in Colca are often found walking and handspinning wool into yarn while they are taking care of chores and talking to friends. Like a thread of yarn, the weavings and wool were the connection string in the story of the places my father had showed me when I was younger.

To show a fully developed setting or to leave the space minimal can be a complex decision. When writing *The Twins' Blanket* (2011), Hyewon originally located the story in a specific time and place (1980 in Seoul) but as the published book features extensive white space, readers are left uncertain about where and when the story happens. Some practices

in the story, such as making the blankets by hand, washing them in a bucket and drying

them in the sun point toward cultural specificity but beyond that, cultural specificity is not

emphasized. Hyewon explained that she used the emotional content as a way to decide: if

the characters' expressions themselves carry most of the emotional weight, the setting

tends to be minimal. Detailed background in her illustrated book, *A Piece of Home* (2016)*,*

carries some of the drama, allowing the characters to look more reserved. This enhances

the sense of isolation in the story, where each member in the family adjusts to the move

from Korea to the US in their own way.

Working with biographies. Biographies are heavily represented in diverse and

multicultural book lists and account for a large proportion of the books by Brian, Floyd and

John. Bader (2013) explains the popularities of picture book biographies since the 1970s:

> Multiculturalism, with its focus on individual achievement; the resurgence of
>
> feminism, another seedbed of role models; the ascendance of new media, including
>
> the highly pictorial, inherently personal internet — may have been the factors that
>
> propelled picture book biographies, reinvented, into the regular line-up. Everything
>
> was becoming personalized. (para. 5)

Biographies tend to orient the artist toward the tension between accuracy and

novelty: They must maintain a degree of accuracy and believability; they must also convey

the real people or real events in new, interesting ways.

To accomplish the first requirement, research, especially research of visual

references, becomes highly important. When working on *Frederick Douglass: The Lion Who*

Wrote History (2017), written by Walter Dean Myers, Floyd was meticulous. He even took

care to research Douglass' photos and photography techniques at the time to determine which side Douglass actually parted his hair.

On the other hand, improvisation and interpretation to explore the pictorial possibility of the characters are also important. Of the many picture book biographies about Frida Kahlo, John Parra's stands out as Frida's likeness is expressed in John's distinctive folk-art style. Brian's loose, lyrical illustration of Martin Luther King in *Martin Rising: Requiem For a King* (2018), written by Andrea Davis Pinkney, retains his general likeness and leaves out most details. To prepare, he had to draw King multiple times to develop muscle memory of how King looked. He still did research and tried to stay faithful to the manuscript, but in this case, accuracy seems to lie more in the essence of a story or idea than the small details.

Artistic Mode of Presentation

In the artistic mode, artists do not approach their work with a predetermined message. Rather, their process is guided by an intrinsic desire to create, experiment, and keep themselves challenged and entertained. This can be seen in sentiment like: "I don't think about intellectually", "It's probably my desire to make art as much art as I could in whatever medium was available" (Brian), "I myself want to be interested" (John), "To me something feels right and it's very instinctive" (Juana)...

Brian often describes his work primarily as an intuitive activity, and to him, meaning making happens retrospectively. One example from Brian's work on *Martin Rising* (2018) and illustrating a poem about King's funeral may illuminate this point further. He talked about his process:

I'd read these poems, and then I'd literally take a nap. I'd have my paper near me

and I'd wake up and I would think, Oh he's kinda going to heaven like an angel but

he's being pulled, so I'd put wings on the casket.

Even the colors came to him intuitively. He used blue for the page, then later realized that

it's the color of the sky

So it's almost like they're all in the sky you know, in crazy ways, even the people

standing on the side of the road. So that kind of gave the feeling of uplifting. And it

wasn't a conscious thought, but it was an intuitive gesture, intuitive decision.

Representational techniques, therefore, do not play a very important role in how he works.
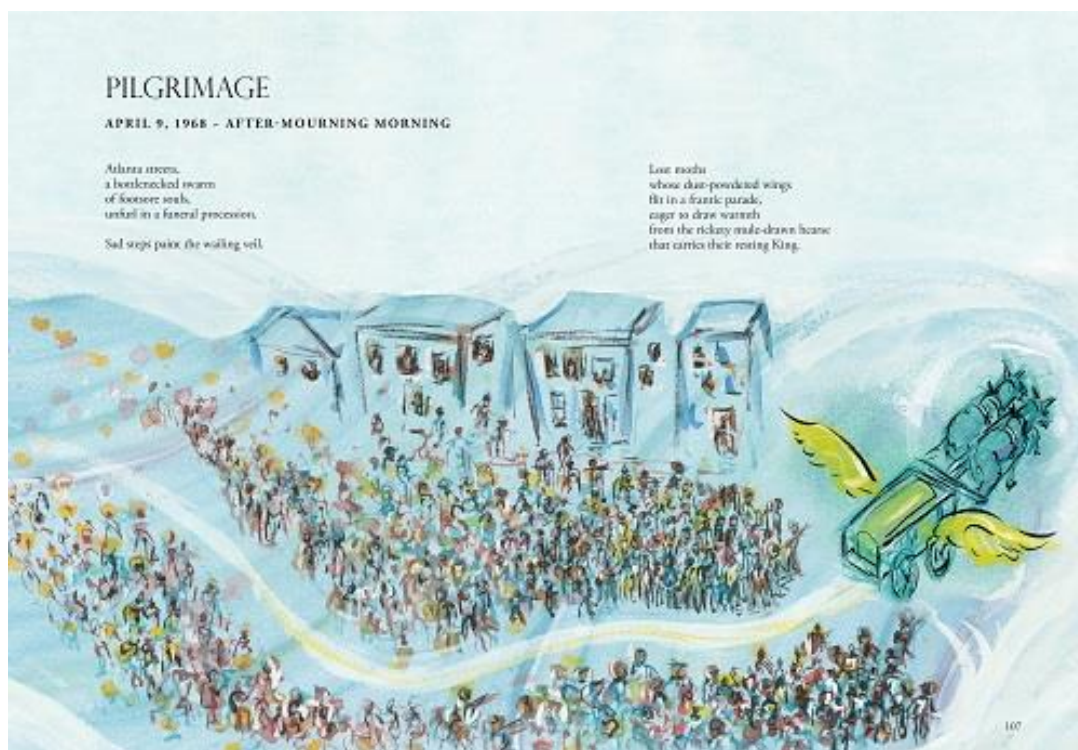

Figure 20: A page from *Martin Rising: Requiem for A King* (2018), illustrated by Brian
Pinkney. Image used with permission from the artist.

The artistic mode may be the most interesting and engaging aspect of artistic work. As

described earlier, artists' description of making, looking, and knowing as an interrelated

process (Chapter 4) suggests the importance of attending to the immediate materiality, responding to the images created earlier, developing a sense about what works and what does not, and letting intuition guide the way. The artistic mode draws attention to aspects of image construction and is helpful to the discussion of diversity as it allows us to see the co-presences of many different things on the same page.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summary of Main Insights

I started the inquiry with the general question about how illustrators navigate the various, sometimes opposing, forces in their work, including artistic, personal, professional, and educational. Imposing a structure on the expansive data and interconnected ideas was a challenge. Ultimately, I settled on identifying three sites of practices that the illustrators participate in: establishing styles, practicing illustration, including both medium-specific and industry activities, and handling diversity. I sought to describe attentively the similar and different ways that the participating artists work and construct themselves at each of these sites. Below are the major insights.

1. The artists' style is a result of material transaction with the medium and features a tension between consistency and change. Changes and variations may be motivated by specific demands of a text, a desire to seek freshness, challenge, and pleasure through experimentation, or contextual factors. Finally, some artists may navigate towards a particular kind of story or subject matter, making such a choice part of their personal expression.

2. The participating artists' stories of how they got started gesture towards the importance of education, professional membership, relationship, formal recognition, and the matter of chance. As applied artists, they have to balance personal interests and practical constraints, including timing, scheduling, pay, and where they are in their career. Their work tends to be intensely social, amounting to negotiated authorship.

3. Illustrating is a complex artistic-intellectual engagement. The foundation of this process is the practice of making to know, during which artists get to know the characters, the story, what works and what does not by making, then looking back at what was created. As they create books for both children and adults, the participants have to respond to and reconcile the differences between these two groups by positioning themselves as both adults and children. They could also do that by focusing on the intrinsic pleasure of their work. In their practice, illustrators engage with the book form and its materiality, the genre expectations, and mobilizing a complex set of storytelling tools to craft visual narratives.

4. When engaging with the language of diversity, the participants grappled with its inadequacy and elusiveness but were ultimately positive.

5. The participants sometimes approach their books from a pedagogical mode where they deliberately plan images, details, or other signs as stand-ins for certain ideas. However, they also create from an intuitive, experimental, responsive, and playful place. In addition, their being a part of the industry is itself a mode of contribution. The current diversity discourse, while limited, allows them a space to speak, participate, and create.

Scholarly Writing as Creative Work - Reflection on the Research Process

Through talking with the artists and thinking about their work, one particular resonance that I experienced was an appreciation for the creative nature of research and writing. I was used to a highly controlled, systematic, and pre-planned approach to qualitative research. Learning and enjoying humanities-oriented scholarship has made me become more aware of my own tendencies, but to practice it was a different matter. This study, although not exactly a humanities-oriented project, attempted to embrace the messy, on-going, unfolding, creative and existentially involved work of writing and thinking. Four

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insights from art practices help me crystalize my learning: *Starting small, Complete the movement, Make, and look again* and *Layering.*

Start Small

A completed painting on the page often starts with tiny sketches and book dummies. Starting small not only helps manage the feeling of overwhelm and anxiety but is an instructive process in its own right. At the beginning of my research, I spent a lot of time thinking about big questions which have no easy answers. A more productive approach would be to start from a small thing, a specific image, a specific book, a simple word. It is easier to find a sense of success with small things, and concrete practices, even when they do not directly make it to the final product, sustain the artist, and that is a more important thing.

A related practice in starting small is to use material different from the final product. Sketching may be done on post-it notes and cheap papers to minimize the pressure to do it well. Writing can be made more material by manipulating the digital writing environment or by writing on paper. During some challenging times, writing with a different tool or technology helped me move forward.

'Complete the Movement'

This expression comes from Brian Pinkney and is related to his experience with dancing, which then transfers into his artmaking. In his watercolor work, he moves quickly, uses big gestures, and avoids interruptions that take him out of the immediate action. 'Complete the movement' means that there is an inherent momentum, fluidity, and energy to an act, and it should be let fully realized. This language made me aware of my tendency to delete and edit as I write even when the sentence has not been completed. Stopping and

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deleting disrupts the flow of thought and prevents it from fully revealing itself. Temporarily

disabling the Delete button on my keyboard has been an informative exercise.

Make, Then Look Again

Making a lot and separating making and looking is central to artists' practice of

making to know. Bringing it into writing, this practice emphasizes the importance of

producing concrete work that could be looked at, shared, and talked about. Writing and re-

reading and editing need to be separated. These ideas are familiar advice for writers, but to

see them be practiced in another field reenergizes my trust in that process.

Layering

Drawing has to do with creating shapes using lines as its only medium. Drawing is

often not the only medium in a finished artwork. Layering, however, is a good metaphor for

academic writing which has to combine multiple types of language--descriptive, analytical,

critical, and imaginative. Thinking of layering is to be mindful that each layer and each

medium can only do so much. It is the act of going back to the work, adding to it that

creates texture. It is the combination of different modes of doing and making and engaging

that makes it interesting.

Reading Complexly

As a way to close this manuscript, I reread Hyewon Yum's author-illustrator book,

Saturday Is Swimming Day (2018) as a case study in reading picture books.

Below is a Kirkus review of this book in its entirety (Kirkus Review, 2018, pars 1-3,

emphasis added):

In this story about new experiences, readers follow a tiny girl who faces her fear of

swimming every Saturday.

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Trying something new can be scary. Saturday mornings seem to start with stomachaches, as **a grumpy little Asian girl** fakes illness to avoid going to the swimming pool. She clings to her mom and hides in a locker. Her body language clearly shows her to be uncomfortable and tense as she stands against the wall while **other children of all shapes and colors** dive right in. Things do not look promising. Week by week, without any pressure from **her white mom**, she returns to the pool and takes tiny steps forward with **the black swim instructor named Mary**. Mary guides her away from the pool's edge and gently builds on small successes each Saturday. Illustrations, done in watercolor and colored pencil, show the blue waters of the pool framed by the cold white floor tiles. Colorful swimsuits, bathing caps, and skin tones splash the pages. Slowly, the narrator finds her fearful feelings begin to change. As the little girl's courage grows, the floor tiles slowly disappear, and the pictures become all water. The unnamed child narrates, **gender indicated by the style of her swimsuit**.

This tender and accessible story of bravery and patience when facing a new situation encompasses a wide range of emotions for **timid children of all shapes and colors**.

The review performs a demographic, representational reading of the book and clearly identifies its multicultural cast: the unnamed grumpy Asian girl ("gender indicated by the style of her swimsuit"), her white mom, her black swim instructor, her peers in various skin tones. The story, even without explicit cultural markers, becomes a multicultural story under this racialized gaze.

Figure 21: An image from Hyewon Yum's *Saturday Is Swimming Day* (2018). Image courtesy of the artist.

Hyewon herself has described the girl as 'Asian looking'. As I examined the text, I found no words that point to the ethnicity of the main character. Simplified cartoons mean facial features are an unreliable way to distinguish; her light skin and dark hair provide inconclusive evidence about her race. The racialized reading of this picture is made possible by a very specific set of conventions that simplifies race to concrete, external, distinctly visible signs. As this reading is becoming more dominant, my concern is that it does not enrich either our understanding of race or our experience with the text. I am reminded of and find both inspiration and consolation in Gombrich's words:

> To read the artist's picture is to mobilise our memories and our experience of the visible world and to test his image through tentative projections. It is not the 'innocent eye', however, that can achieve this match but only the inquiring mind that knows how to probe the ambiguities of vision. (Gombrich, 1962, p. 264)

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