Creating a Children's Book

Honors 499-Thesis

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Abstract:

The primary objective was to learn the process of creating a children’s book by working through the necessary steps and creating our own; a second objective was to teach children to care for the environment in a creative way. While I assisted with the development of the characters, setting, and plot, my main task was to complete the illustrations accompanying the text. I worked through a number of various materials and styles to find what would work best for producing the pictures. I decided on making them digitally in Adobe Illustrator, then designed the content to reflect the story and prepared the book for printing. The finished product is a thirty-two page fictional children’s book conveying a message to kids about how to keep the earth clean, healthy, and beautiful.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Mrs. Wittkamper for advising me through this project. She provided valuable information throughout the entire process of creating the book.

I would also like to thank Liz Perona for the initial idea, and inviting me to work with her on this project.
When my friend Liz asked me to illustrate a children’s book that she would be writing, I immediately accepted. A few years ago I had seriously considered becoming a children’s book illustrator, but haven’t had the chance to pursue the idea. This opportunity seemed like a perfect place to begin exploring the world of illustration. Furthermore, Liz thought that the storyline of our book could contain a message teaching kids to care for the environment. Promoting a sustainable planet has also become a passion of mine throughout my college career, and what better audience to inform of the issue than children? With the initial excitement out of the way, it was time to get to work. After meeting with our advisor and doing research about the process of creating a children’s book, we prepared quite a long to-do list. From the basics of forming the plot, characters, and setting and reflecting these aspects into the pictures, to executing the proper layout and inquiring about printing techniques and prices, we discovered our book was going to take a lot of time and hard work. We weren’t hindered, however, and despite a few bumps along the way, we completed our task.

After establishing that we wanted to create a children’s book conveying some sort of message about caring for the environment, both of our trains of thought immediately went toward using animals as our main characters in the story. We thought it would make sense since animals spend their whole lives in the natural environment and it’s important for them to keep it clean, healthy, and beautiful. Also, an easy way to make a more serious topic kid-friendly was by using young animal friends that kids can relate to. As for the actual story, we had no idea what it should be about. After researching the important aspects of a good children’s book, we knew there needed to be a central problem that our characters could discover and eventually solve. Working through the
problem and arriving at the solution along with the animals, the children reading our book will be left with a sense of accomplishment. We started coming up with various issues dealing with the environment, but it was difficult to find something that was easy enough for children to understand and still be unique.

Since we weren't really getting anywhere with the plot, we decided to go ahead and develop our characters and perhaps a plot would develop out of their personalities. Originally we began with five animals, each discovering something that wasn't quite right in the forest and reporting back to their other friends the problem they had found. Then all of the animals would come together to help restore the forest to its natural state. As we struggled to think of five fairly simple troubles that the animals could encounter, it became clear that we could never fit all of this information into such a short book. We deleted a character, a dilemma, and moved another animal to a simpler role of comic relief. We decided upon three animals and their predicaments, and that seemed like a good number of adventures to be had. However, we still couldn't find a way to tie everything together at the end without complications. Finally, after discussing every possible way to finish out the story, a light bulb came on for both of us and we cut our cast down to three main characters and only one mystery to be solved amongst them. This amount of content would flow smoothly through a thirty-two page picture book. Boris the Bear, Posie the Porcupine, and Todd (later to become Templeton) the Turtle made the final cut.

I decided it would be beneficial to read other children's books involving the environment to get a sense of what kind of situation our characters should be put into in order for our story to be successful for the audience. *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss
immediately came to mind; he portrayed the fundamental principle of why cutting down trees is harmful to the earth and the creatures living there, but certainly added his own flair to the message that made it interesting to people of all ages. For my role as illustrator, I also began looking at books with animals, such as Eric Carle’s *The Mixed Up Chameleon*, and took note of how other illustrators chose to depict their characters to get some inspiration.

At last, after Liz decided that our animal forest should have a community lake, she came up with the idea that the lake would be full of trash and it would need to be cleaned out; it would portray the simple lesson to not litter that kids encounter in their everyday lives. Each animal had contributed garbage to the lake, not knowing that everyone else was doing the same thing, and now all the animals would have to work together to get it all out. But how were they going to accomplish this? We needed a creative solution that involved the whole forest of animals working as a team. I came up with an idea that, for me, was probably the most exciting part of this whole book-creating process; the animals would fish the trash out! In reality of course, ‘catching trash’ wouldn’t be the most practical solution, but we both thought it would add a fun element to the story. Now Liz could sit down and write out the story, and I could begin making it come alive.

I soon found out, however, that illustrating isn’t just drawing a picture of what the words were describing. The first thing I needed to do was to decide what kind of medium to use. At first we thought it would be fitting to create the pictures out of things from nature, such as leaves and bark, but since it was in the middle of winter that obviously wasn’t going to work. Also, in order for the book to be printed I would have needed to
take photographs of the illustrations, and trying to capture the images somewhat professionally would have been a whole new adventure in itself with only an everyday digital camera and general knowledge of photography. Option number two was to use old scraps of paper to make collages, but I soon became unenthusiastic about this idea when I thought about how much time this would involve; a whole picture book full of tiny little bits of paper just wasn’t going to fit into my schedule.

Just like how we simplified our story, the answer was to simplify the illustrations as well. As a twenty-two year old college student, I still get satisfaction out of coloring a picture with a pack of pointy Crayola crayons. Using a mixture of Crayolas and soy-based crayons (made through a process that is better for the environment), I produced a series of rough draft pictures. Even though they were only rough drafts, the pictures just weren’t looking the way I wanted them to. The colors weren’t as vibrant as I had hoped, and since my animal-drawing skills still aren’t exactly up to par, it was difficult to keep the characters consistent from page to page.

This project has definitely proved to be challenging, but I wasn’t ready to give up since Liz was counting on me and our characters still needed to be brought to life. At last I had an idea that I was sure was going to work. As a Geography major, I was currently in a cartography class learning how to make maps in a program called Adobe Illustrator. I certainly wasn’t a master of the program, nor am I now even after making fourteen full-page illustrations (along with several maps in class), but I had enough control of the functions to make our animal friends proceed with their mission and turn the polluted lake turn into a sparkling success. I was so excited that I finally found a way to make our book that I used all of my free time throughout the next few weeks to work on the
illustrations until I was finished. We officially had something that resembled a children’s book!

Liz thought it would be useful to take a draft of the story into a few classrooms to get input from our future audience. The fifth graders managed to come up with a list of things they did and didn’t like; probably the biggest adjustment we made was changing Todd’s name to Templeton. Since Posie and Boris had slightly out of the ordinary names, Todd just didn’t fit in. Also, having the book edited and looking through it many more times, we made other changes such as making the lake appear dirtier in the pre-cleanup pictures and making it clear that the animal friends had parental supervision in their adventure.

Now it was time to have our book printed. Before even starting to write the book we had gone to talk with a couple of printers in town to see what kind of format we needed to have our book in for preparation of printing, what the material options were for our finished product, and how much this was going to cost. We talked to Hiatt Printing first, since it was closer in location and cheaper, but we weren’t impressed by the wall-calendar type format that our book would be printed in. Kinkos showed us a more professional looking product, but was definitely more expensive. The setup for our pages at both places was the same, but either way it was going to be tricky for me to put the files into this arrangement since my double-page spreads needed to be cut in half in order for them to be printed in the correct order for the book. Luckily, Kinkos could do all of this for me for a small fee. We decided to choose them because we wanted our hard work to be reflected in the finished product.
As I have described, this project has had many ups and downs. In addition to learning the many steps of creating a children’s book, I also experienced the satisfaction of working in a team. I normally enjoy working on projects by myself, but it was fun bouncing around ideas with each other and I think this helped to challenge the boundaries of our creativity. I know in the real world of writing and illustrating it must be much more stressful since there are deadlines and profits to be made, but by completing our small-scale assignment I have at least gotten a taste of what all of this hard work is for. It was satisfying not only to have reached our goal, but also to have accomplished something that we had never done before.
Sources:


Templeton's Party, Boris' Plan, and the Fancy Fountain

written by: Liz Perona  illustrated by: Erin Luebke
Templeton's Party, Boris' Plan, and the Fancy Fountain

Liz Perona & Erin Luebke
For kids who care!
Today was one of the hottest days that the animals living in the forest near 118th Street had ever experienced. By lunchtime, Templeton the Turtle, Boris the Bear, and Posie the Porcupine had just about had enough of the "playing outside to get rid of their energy" that their parents insisted upon.
The friends had already played hide and go seek, capture the flag, and ring-around-the-rosie at least three times. They were hot, tired, and red in the face. All of the animals needed a cool break.
Templeton the Turtle decided to invite everyone over for a party at the family lake house, because it was just too hot to be outside in the heat. He went home to help his parents get ready for the party.
There was much to be done before the party began. He and his mom made Templeton’s Top Secret Seaweed Popsicles. The recipe had been handed down from generation to generation, and it was certainly delicious and nutritious.
After the popsicles were hardening in the freezer, Templeton went outside to help his dad get the lake ready. They set up the diving board, cleaned off the picnic table, and picked up the trash around the shore.
After this, the lake was almost ready for the first swim of the season. The only thing left to do was to check the water temperature. Templeton stuck one toe in, two toes in, three toes in ... \textit{PUSH}...
The next thing Templeton knew, he was in the water...with Boris. Luckily, for Templeton's shell, the water temperature was just right.
The rest of his friends arrived a few minutes later. The fun began. All of the kids started playing an exciting game of Marco-Tailo. After everyone had a turn, they jumped off the diving board.
Splash, Splash, Splash!

Posie managed to create quite a splash because of her quills. Boris, who liked to be a show off, was next on the board. He always performed showy dives, and this one was no different.
He ran to the end of the board as fast as he could, bounced three times, twisted twice, flipped once... and landed bottom first in the water with quite a lot of speed.
The crowd erupted with laughter, but it slowly died out as Boris came up to the surface...
Boris came up to the surface looking rather curious. He had a spring on his head, a tire around his middle, and an old thimble on his tail.
By this time, the crowd was silent, except for the littlest one--Posie. She said what everyone else was thinking, "How did all of this junk get in the lake?"
Due to the discovery of trash in the lake, the youngsters were not allowed back in the water for the day. Disappointing as this was, it gave the friends even more reason to find a solution to the pollution.
Boris was especially bothered by the trash and determined to get every last piece of it out. The friends spent the rest of the day jumping, splashing, and eating seaweed popsicles near the sprinkler.
After dinner, the friends camped out in their secret tree house to decide what to do. They made a long list of ways to clean out the lake. It began with scuba diving to collect trash and ended with putting hungry fish in the lake to eat the trash.
Both of these, and all of the ideas in between were not very reasonable ideas. The friends put their heads together one last time. "I’ve got it!" exclaimed Templeton as an idea suddenly came to him, "If EVERYONE brought a fishing pole to the lake--we could fish the trash out!"
After discussing all of their ideas with their parents, the final plan to fish out the trash was decided upon. All there to do now was to get ready for the big day.
The animals painted signs to tell all of their neighbors and fellow animals about the "First Annual Clean-Up the Lake Day." As the trio painted, they all hoped for a hippopotamus-sized turnout.
Luckily, the very next day was a warm, sunny day, and EVERY animal came to the lake with a fishing pole. Pole after pole could be seen around the edges of the lake. Each pole was ready in the lake, waiting for some trash to bite. Animals from every part of the forest spent the whole day fishing piece after piece of trash out of the lake.
Of course, parents were around to supervise, and there were even different kinds of poles for beginning fisheranimals. Some poles had magnets, some had typical hooks, and some even had hinges like a mouth to chomp down on trash.
The piles of trash from the lake were getting bigger and bigger and bigger. The animals began to realize how much stuff they had been throwing in the lake. Each animal thought they were the only one throwing stuff in the lake, but that just wasn’t the case. They all contributed to a big polluted mess.
All the animals were tired and hungry, and rightfully so because the sun was beginning to set as Boris fished the last piece of trash out of the lake. Now the question was, what were they to do with all of this trash?
The littlest ones knew just what to do.
It took them quite a few days of gluing, painting, and glittering, but they ended up with quite a masterpiece.
Now the middle of the lake contains a fancy fountain made from all of the animals' junk. On top of that fountain is the very spring that started it all. The fountain stands tall, as a reminder to all that trash should only be thrown in trashcans—not in ANY beautiful lake.
Even today, that lake in the forest near 118th Street is still one of the cleanest lakes within approximately 648 square miles. There is only one other new addition--a sign that reads, "The littlest ones often make the hugest difference."
About the Author:

Liz Perona is graduating from Ball State University in May 2009 with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She hopes to get a teaching job in the Indianapolis area. This is her first children's book. Writing a children’s book was a new adventure, and she hopes that there will be more books in the future!

About the Illustrator:

Erin Luebke plans on receiving her bachelor's degree in Geography at Ball State University in May 2010. This is also her first children's book. In the future, she hopes to further promote a healthy and sustainable planet using her creativity.
A hot summer day begins it all.

Some young animals decide on a cool dip in the lake--only to discover the lake is immensely polluted with trash.

What can be done when there is simply too much junk in the lake?

Read on to discover how our furry friends solve this ‘fishy’ problem...