

Making a Children's Illustration Portfolio

Portfolio Presentation, where do I start?

- You need to practice your style until you are proficient at it, until you deem it to be of professional quality.
- Learn from your mistakes, get your work critiqued and listen to the critique objectively. This is important!
- Look at established people in the business whom you admire, styles that are similar to yours, etc. What can you learn from comparing their work to yours?
- You need to actually read children's books. Study examples of what picture books truly are, a balance of words and pictures, an interdependence of two wonderful forms of art; a marriage. You'll soon be able to distinguish quality from what's just trendy.

What to include?

- 12-15 pieces of art, color, and some black and white if you're good at it and enjoy it. It should be the best art you can do. Quality is more important than quantity. Include artwork that best displays your skills in:
 - o Anatomical drawing (figures, faces, and animals)
 - o Characters/ Setting/Narrative
- Remember that a picture book has a pace, a motion that constantly pushes you forward. You might want to show that progression in a series of sequential pieces, showing fine examples of:
 - o People—all ages, grandma's, dad's, brothers and sisters, but especially,
 - o Kids—with varied expressions, movements, moods, etc.,
—with interesting, vibrant compositions and layouts.
- Make sure you show interaction between your characters. The people you'll be running across in children's book tend have different points of view, the strongest characters—characters we remember—evolve throughout the story. Show that you're aware of that and can illustrate those changes consistently.
- Animals—If you're going to be working in children's books you're certainly bound to come across an animal or two. Study their movements, anatomy, and habitat. Remember that animals can show emotion as well, just ask any dog/cat/horse/bird/dolphin lover. You get my meaning.

Design/Composition

- Your portfolio pieces should show how you would best handle certain design problems in composition, size, etc. Show a variety of illustrations, spots or vignettes, jackets, double spreads, etc.
Ex: showing a double-spread might let them know you're familiar with the "gutter" problems, the text layout, etc.
- Show interesting perspectives or dramatic lighting, show foreshortening, exaggerations and distortions, don't forget shadows, etc. Show a sense of motion and dynamic action in your layouts as well as in your characters.

Style

- It's an extremely competitive business. In my opinion, showing a variety of styles in your portfolio will make it difficult for editors to remember you and it will make you look inconsistent. Keep one set style. And you must show consistency of that style. If you prefer to work in many styles, create full portfolios in whatever style you'd like to do, show them as a whole.
- Don't do one style because it may be more popular or because it's what you think others want, you must love what you do, so work in a style you love.
- Be honest. Whichever style or medium you like to work in, are you at the point where that style is competitive? Meaning, if you work in a realistic style, can it compete with similar work in the market? If not, learn how to draw those eyes, hands, etc. or you may want to change your style to one less anatomically restrictive or difficult.
- More on this subject can be found at www.purplecrayon.com. "A Question of Style" by Harold Underdown

Remember

- The work has to be conceptual, not just decorative. An illustrator is a storyteller.
- Think of your portfolio as if it were a picture book.. A book has a beginning, middle and end: it should have a "hook" at the beginning to make you want to turn the page, to grab the viewer's attention. Like a good story with good characters, the portfolio should continue to develop and to hold the viewers interest, it should be dramatic and dynamic, make you want to remember it.
- The illustrations should compliment each other, be consistent. And like a good picture-book it should end in a very satisfying conclusion that leaves the viewer wanting more.

- Look at each piece objectively, honestly, and ask yourself:
- Are you happy, proud and enthusiastic about each piece? Get rid of the ones you're not.
- Is it your best work? The best job you can do? If not, it shouldn't be in the portfolio. One mediocre piece can bring down 14 great ones.
- Is the art technically sound? Any perspective problems? Anatomical problems? If you can spot them, I'll bet you an art director can spot them faster. Dissect each piece of art, study it for any defects.
- Have you convinced the viewer that you are a storyteller? That you can create or build on a character? Create a sense of time and place? Show motion and emotion?

DO THE WORDS AND THE PICTURES "DANCE" TOGETHER?

Well then. You've got a great portfolio!