

# Children's Book Publishing + Illustrator Tip Sheet

## #1 – Decide on the Specifics of Your Book

When hiring your illustrator, make sure you know the specifics of your book first. This includes:

- The trim size of your children's print book. The most common children's book sizes are 8.5" x 8.5" and 7" x 10". Also if you want paperback, hardcover, or both. Hardcover will be more expensive to publish, and always has to be printed outside of the US. Lastly, consider an ebook conversion of whatever physical form you publish.
- The length: the average children's book is 24 to 32 pages.
- The timeframe within which you want the book completed, as this will impact your publishing date and the illustrator you choose to hire. Many illustrators need a lead time of several months, depending on how long it takes them to complete the job, or if they have a queue of clients before you. A good rule of thumb is to reach out to an illustrator to start negotiations at least a year to a year and a half prior to whenever you want to publish.
- Your budget: what's the maximum amount you're willing or able to pay?

## #2 – Start Researching Illustrators

Research, research, research! Visit the library or your local indie bookstore to get an idea of several children's book interiors to see what tone and vision you want to achieve.

Common drawing styles include:

- Cartoonish cute or childlike (exaggerated features and are not true to life)
- Cartoonish funny or on the darker side
- Whimsical/fantasy (charming, childlike, dreamy, colorful)
- Realistic (fairly true-life proportions, may be simplistic or detailed)
- Sketch drawing (unrefined, often expressive)
- Line drawings (no color and have no gradation, only uses lines)
- Stylized (not realistic, made of up geometric shapes or patterns, flat colors)

Also consider the mediums often used in children's books:

- Ink or pen
- Pencil
- Watercolor (whimsical, delicate, bright)
- Acrylic (opaque colors and textures)
- Charcoal

- Collage (created by attaching different materials such as cut paper, photographs, etc.)
- Multimedia (combination of different mediums, i.e., watercolor and ink, or charcoal and acrylic)
- Lithography (a flat surface is treated with oil in areas to create an image)
- Freehand or stylized digital illustrations (drawing done in different types of software)

Tip: Study fairly recent books. Books from thirty years ago don't match what is selling now. Here are some links with good examples:

<https://graphicmama.com/blog/children-book-illustrations-examples-for-inspiration/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/01/books/review/best-illustrated-childrens-books-2019.html>

The style of illustrations also depends on the age group you are trying to target. Consider how the illustrations for *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Goodnight Moon*, Dr Seuss books, *I Wish You More*, and *I Want My Hat Back* are all different and still amazing in their own ways.

Pull the books you love from your shelf and jot down the illustrator's name to look up. Ask yourself what you love about those styles so you can be clear in what you're looking for in your own illustrator.

There are four types of illustrations for children's books, and your book will benefit if you mix these up throughout:

- Spot illustrations (smaller illustrations framing the text, usually no larger than quarter of a page, that are often placed as a chapter heading or corner decoration; these are often done in a sketch style)
- Half-page illustration (often accompanying text)
- Single (full-page) illustration
- Spread illustration (spread across two full pages, normally with text on the illustration)

Some great resources for finding children's book illustrators:

- Instagram (try hashtags like #illustrator or #illustratorwanted or #kidlitartist to start)
- Groups like [Children's Book Authors and Illustrators](#)
- [Fiverr](#)
- [Upwork](#) (use this platform and others like it to post your illustration job, including all the important details like the number of pages, deadlines, synopsis, budget parameters, and what you're looking for)
- [GetYourBookIllustrations.com](#)

The following websites have portfolios of many illustrators' work, where you can search by subject, art style, art medium, location, and so on:

- [Children's Illustrators](#)
- [Deviant Art](#)
- [Directory of Illustration](#)
- [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#)
- [Workbook](#)

### #3 – Understand an Illustrator's Unique Offering

Hiring an illustrator is an expensive endeavor. **First, always look at their portfolio.** Then ask yourself: what unique element can they bring to the table?

**Here are some questions to ask potential illustrators:**

- Have they illustrated a published book before?
- What software/tools do they use? If you already have a publisher in mind, make sure you understand the size and format for the completed illustrations so you're working with those specifications from the get-go.
- Do they format the book for publishing, or do they only provide illustrations?
- Will they design and create a cover illustration?
- How responsive are they to your communication?
- Can they work with any deadlines you might already have or are working toward?
- What age groups have they illustrated for?

Research the artist as much you can. Read available reviews, peruse their social media, website, portfolio, ask for references, etc.

### #4 – Navigating Illustrator Contracts and Fees

When looking for the right illustrator, *don't settle*. You'll be grateful you didn't.

Illustrating a book is a lot of work, and it's typically not budget friendly. While you might be lucky to find a less-experienced illustrator who is starting out to illustrate your children's book for less than a few thousand dollars, the typical cost for an experienced, vetted illustrator usually starts at around \$5,000.

In the traditional publishing industry, illustrators are usually vetted and acquired by a publisher and offered an advance that will be paid off once the book begins to sell. Once that's paid off, the illustrator often splits royalties with the author.

In the nontraditional publishing space where authors are not paid advances, illustrators are typically a work-for-hire contractor for the author, paid a flat rate.

### **So How Much Should You Expect to Pay?**

This is not an easy question to answer, as there are many factors involved: the illustrator's experience, the number of illustrations, the detail/color factors, size, deadline parameters, and more.

For a standard 32-page children's picture book, expect to pay \$5,000 and up. You may find a less expensive (and therefore less experienced) illustrator, but remember that hiring an experienced illustrator will save you time, money, and grief down the road. Experienced children's book illustrators can charge up to \$20,000 for a color picture book and its cover. A 32-page picture book will probably include 20 full-color illustrations (assuming that most are two-page spreads), and include the book cover. If you pay, say, \$5,000, your book illustrator is getting paid \$250 per illustration. That's not a huge amount, considering how many hours it often takes to create a custom illustration.

### **Get the Details in Writing**

Make sure you execute a contract with your illustrator. It must state what you can use the artwork for, how much it'll cost, what the timeline is, and whether or not you have the exclusive use of the artwork. Make sure to include a clause stipulating that you'll receive the illustrations as digital files in the needed sizes, resolutions, and formats for printing your book. [[do we have a sample contract we might be able to offer? If not I can try to track one down]]

### **#5: Working with Your Book Illustrator**

Once the contract is signed and any deposits paid, your illustrator will get started. This relationship should be collaborative so you are both on the same page about the vision and timeline, paired with the illustrator's professional opinion and design expertise. With experienced designers, it's a good idea to consider and accept their ideas even when it's not what you originally envisioned. They may surprise you with how much better they make your book with their creativity, and giving them some ownership in the process of bringing your story to life is part of this collaboration.

On the other hand, clear communication with your illustrator is key. Tell them, for example, that you want a character to always look determined, or if a character is a specific race, or if you want the barn in the story to be blue. Another helpful tip to make

sure you and your illustrator are on the same page is that the illustrations not use the same angle, distance (close-up, medium or wide view), poses etc. in all illustrations. Make sure they are varied, and to make sure the illustrations don't repeat the text. Avoid putting descriptions in the text (e.g. "green bike," "blue house," "brown puppy") because the illustrations will show these things.

The first thing you'll see from your illustrator are some roughs (pencil or digital sketches) to make sure the illustrations are on track. When you review the roughs, sit with them for at least a couple days before giving feedback. Consider how they'll fit in the allotted page space. Even if they are not what you envisioned, consider the designer's ideas; maybe they've captured something you didn't envision, and taking time to sit with the illustrations might make them grow on you. The artist should expect you to request some changes and also provide helpful suggestions.

Once the roughs are approved, the artist will finalize the illustrations and add color. Usually, final payment is due upon final approval of the illustration, or the contract might stipulate a payment schedule that involves paying some money up front.

Contact [lauren@sparkpointstudio.com](mailto:lauren@sparkpointstudio.com) for our list of updated recommended illustrators.