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FACING OUR DRAGONS: WONDER AS A TOOL OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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FACING OUR DRAGONS:
WONDER AS A TOOL OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

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ABSTRACT

The recitation and reenactment of children's stories with their associated images and illustrations are often an individual's first encounters with storytelling, literature, and guided imaginative experiences. These stories may have a general focus on academic, social, or ethical and moral instruction, especially through the use of anthropomorphic characters and magical or mythical elements. There is, however, a significant subgenre of children's literature which focuses intently on exercises in imagination and wonder. Imagination and wonder are tools of communication, but even more they are a critical part of growing up, maintaining perspective, and embracing joy in literary forms. Literature as the inciting factor in wonder allows children to explore complex problems and their own concerns in a safe space.

This project is an exploration of communicative tools in children's literature with a special emphasis on how wonder is created and used in the telling of these stories. The project combines research with the creation of children's literature to develop a fuller understanding of how and why imagination is so ingrained in books for children. To do so, I am writing and illustrating three children's books with distinctive fantasy elements and characters. and using my experience in authorship to ground my research in what elements are critical to "good" children's books. The research examines works of authors past and present to discover what is necessary for children's books to contain if they are to be hallmarks of children's literature which appeal to all people regardless of age.

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FOUNDATIONS

For many cultures, Western and beyond, the oral recitation of children's stories, with the accompanying images, illustrations, or gestures is an individual's first interaction with storytelling. These stories generally focus on academic, social, or ethical and moral instruction, especially through the use of anthropomorphic characters and the use of magical or mythical elements. Stories designed for children provide initial exposure to social norms and a culture's mythology. These stories also operate as perpetuation of cultural ideals and introduce types of language used explicitly in the communication of stories and folklore as a linguistic model. Images, illustrations, and gestures activate the imagination to engage with the stories, mythologies, cultural models, and their characters beyond the words spoken or written on the page. Imagination allows for the application of the lessons presented in the tale, but does not exclusively exist to support moral learning; rather it is a component of development and processing. The combination of imagination and education create a rich history of literature intended for child audiences.

The origins of illustrated children's stories are somewhat unclear, as the realm of academia often does not include the traditions of global Indigenous cultures. However, one of the earliest illustrated works specifically tailored for children is John Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* published in 1657, which was created with the goal of teaching children about language and religion. Because the general public of the time was not expected to be literate, it follows that books written explicitly for children would center on the social expectations of the society for which they were written.

One of the most commonly recognized collections of stories told to children was Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's anthology originally published in 1812. Grimms' stories, however, were

neither illustrated, nor designed for children, as they were merely intended for cultural preservation and academic consumption by scholars. The tales were gathered primarily through oral recitation throughout the educated public in Germany and written down for cultural preservation. The stories have since evolved into the children's stories known today for their prolific and diverse illustrations and iterations. They have evolved through time from the original dark tales into what can be broadly defined as illustrated children's stories.

Aesop's Fables were similarly not originally illustrated, but intended to be told to children as lessons. They were designed to be recited to children as moral instruction and the expectations of the social system of Greek society. Aesop's work has also been illustrated in many iterations to support and contribute to the written text of the fables because the original tales were dictated orally to children of a culture accustomed to verbal storytelling by storytellers, either parents or social elders. The tales themselves focus on anthropomorphic characters with explicit messages children are meant to gain. The fables generally have a patient, clever, or humble animal character who is opposed by a boastful, arrogant, or deceitful character. Children were intended to emulate the patience, or humility of the protagonistic character after hearing the story, and thereby apply the moral lessons gained from the fable to their daily lives.

The definition of "children's stories" varies from person to person and author to author depending upon the time in which one lives. According to the Library of Congress Collections Policy Statement¹, children's literature is "material written and produced for the information or entertainment of children and young adults," including "nonfiction, literary and artistic genres in physical and digital formats." *Orbis Pictus* is a children's story because it was written with the intent of educating children and contains illustrations to support the literary material being presented. Grimms' Fairy Tales are children's stories because they are accounts of verbal tales

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/chi.pdf>

told to children, but, when they were written, were not originally designed for children's entertainment or education. C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* are children's books because they were written to reach readers "of any age," (Lewis, "On Three Ways" 52). They include some limited illustrations, though the text is more dense per page.

In the modern definition of a children's book, literary works for children take three primary forms: board books, picture books, and chapter books. Each is defined by their complexity, physical design, and intended audience. Christopher Denise's *Knight Owl*, or Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess*, or Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight, Moon* and *Runaway Bunny* all fall within the modernized definition of a children's picture book—stories written for children's consumption, usually as entertainment with a moral or social educational undertone, accompanied by an array of illustrations or images to support the main text. Picture books offer a balance of more complex plots and engaging illustrations in a short format. Board books are often adaptations of longer and more complex picture books, reimagined for simplicity and republished for higher durability. They are aimed to survive the handling of babies and toddlers, though there are some books, like Christopher Denise's *Knight Owl's Little Christmas*, that were written to become board books without being published as picture books. *Goodnight, Moon*, Sam McBratney's *Guess How Much I Love You*, and Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* represent a small sample of the numerous children's books that have been adapted to board books following their release as picture books. Board books contain simple, vibrant stories intended to capture and hold the attention of a young audience with a relatively short attention span and the need for sustained engagement. Serial works like Mary Pope Osborn's *The Magic Treehouse*, or *Rainbow Magic* written under the collective pseudonym Daisy Meadows are commonly classified as children's chapter books because they are written for children, contain

large bodies of text accompanied by only occasional illustrations, and are more advanced in content, linguistics, and length for older children. The *Narnia* books would also presently fall into this chapter book category, though the division was less prevalent when the books were originally published in the 1950s. Chapter books are intended to communicate complex stories with deep characters and layered motivations and hold the attention of a more mature audience looking for higher-stakes encounters. Each modern division of children's literature generally is intended for children in different age groups; Board books are typically intended for children between newborn and 3 years old; Picture books are typically intended for children between the ages of 3 and 8 years old; Chapter books are typically intended for children graduated from picture books between the ages of 7 and 10 years old.

Much of children's literature includes magical elements as a means of entertaining and engaging a young audience to avail them of the greater message of moral or social education. Books which employ these elements and story-telling techniques are not exclusively children's literature, nor are children's books required to include these, though many of the works noted above include elements of mythology, fantasy, magic, or anthropomorphic characters. There exists some debate on the necessity of magic and fantasy as a means of communicating in children's literature. Religious leaders, especially, argue against encouraging interest in the "occult" in a young child's education, as various groups in the United States seek to limit literature available to children. There are others, including C.S. Lewis himself, who argue magic can contrarily be used in the communication of allegory as a tool for "the stuff [one] had to say," ("Sometimes Fairy Stories" 66). There are yet more, such as Bruno Bettelheim, that argue magic is a necessity for children to explore and examine their anxieties, and then learn the ability to leave them in fantasies (Bettelheim 71).

Regardless of the format and magical themes, “children’s literature” has historically been broadly defined because of its division into multiple formats and modes through ages and societies. For the purposes of this project the phrases “children’s books” and “children’s literature” are used synonymously with “picture books,” as early exposure to thematic events is the focus of the books written. While children’s literature has previously been studied as a method of educating children, it is rare to study these works as their own genre. This project seeks to study the category of children’s books as a distinctive literary category and assess what elements of these stories are used to address children’s concerns.

This University Honors project is designed for the use of magic and fantastical and mythical elements because of their efficacy as a means for teaching children and adults alike. The books are designed to account for both Bettelheim’s, and Lewis’s views of magic, though there are no stories included in the project which avoid the use of magic, fantasy, or mythical elements altogether. The goal of excluding realism and realistic fiction in these stories is to explore magic and fantasy as components of wonder and how they can be used to address children’s concerns without exacerbating them. Each of the completed books is designed for a specific format to explore the various considerations necessary in designing children’s literature devoted to the creation of wonder. While wonder can be built through realism, it is the goal of this project to examine how authors stimulate the imagination through elements which children know to be fictional; children know dragons do not exist in their world, but still identify with the characters outwitting dragons.

RESEARCH

While the history of children's literature is complex and layered, it is the focus of this project to analyze the elements of children's literature that speak to children's fears and create works within the genre that is children's literature. Establishing a universal list of the most iconic, well-loved, or generally famous children's books would be virtually impossible because of the subjective nature of those categories and the vast range of picture books that exist through publishing houses, self-publishing, and indie companies. There exist, however, lists of honored books and awards for writing, illustration, and the representation of diverse experiences from Caldecott to Newbury to Sibert. These honors are awarded based on the perspective of a committee. The decision for the Caldecott, for example, is made by the award committee of the Association for Library Services for Children. The actualization of those determinations relies heavily on the judge's personal preferences in story-telling, illustration, and cultural values and experiences. This presents a challenge in selecting the most impactful works of children's literature because of the subjective nature of preference. This project, therefore, selects books based on their impact in children's literature, the tools and elements they use to convey their message, and the wonder they incite. The selection process focused especially on books that continue to be sold in bookstores and reside in libraries well beyond their original release date because of their renown.

Bruno Bettelheim, while not a children's author himself, was a psychologist with a unique focus on children's emotional, mental, and psychological development and treatment. In his examination on the purposes of magic in children's development, *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim posits that children must be exposed to their fears in the space of stories to cope with their anxieties and the challenges presented by the world outside of themselves (Bettelheim 98).

His avowed belief, as presented in the book, is that children gain nothing from exposure to sanitized tales which contain no stakes; when there is no conflict, there can be nothing to overcome and therefore nothing at the end of the story which satisfies the “hero’s rushing after adventures,” (Bettelheim 283). Magic, in this manner, should be used as a tool to represent and, in some ways, alleviate, the fears and anxieties that exist in a child’s mind and allow them to manage the challenges presented to children through the course of their development.

It is writers like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien who discuss stories and fairy stories as important contributors to society. Lewis’s “On Stories” argues that good stories arise from what exists in the real world; he argues that art, regardless of its fantastical elements, contains a reflection of life which seeks to explore some truth about the world (26). His popular *Narnia* works were inspired by an image of a lamppost which became the iconic representation of the series. There is an element of joy and pleasure taken from what he calls “fairy land” that is satisfying to people of all ages, but serves as a different type of opportunity for children’s development because “juvenile taste is human taste (Lewis, “On Juvenile Tastes” 70). “Fairy land” is, to Lewis, a realm which generates longing for something that is often out of reach (“On Three Ways” 57). It is that precisely longing that creates wonder at both the ordinariness of the world and the fictional and fantastic world. While the space of “Fairy Land” is strictly fictional, Lewis argues that the act of placing something in a new realm provides “real potency,” (“Sometimes Fairy Stories” 66). Tolkien wrote a similar essay “On Fairy Stories” which defines “fairy stories” and establishes them as reasonable and equally acceptable for adults as for children (22). Fairy stories, he claims, do not rely on lack of understanding of reality, but rather the “secondary belief” that allows all readers to recognize that the world of the story is separate from reality, but is self-contained and consistent to enable immersive experiences (Tolkien 18) .

The immersion in the tale is not a suspension of disbelief, but true belief that while this fictional world may not exist in the same sense that a tree does, it exists because of the craft of the story and the joy that is gained from it. Readers are surrounded by what the author has created in their story and embraced its truth for that fictional world. This experience of a realm outside the ordinary allows for engaged wonder at something that does not exist in the child's primary world. These are elements generally attributed to children's works, but Tolkien argues fairy stories create a recovery of perspective that is even more impactful in the lives of adults because they require recovery from monotony and clouded perspectives of reality while children do not. Creating a world which enables this combined recovery and inspiration sourced from reality is the foundation upon which many successful stories, including children's stories, build worlds and tales satisfying to readers of all ages.

A fable, conversely, is not intended to create wonder in the same manner, but to create a story to support a lesson. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau complained that fables generally were not suitable for instructing children in morality and social norms, even as that is their primary purpose. He argued that children often identify with the wrong character throughout the history of fables (Rousseau). Fables also, he claims, create a false sense of moral superiority in children because they begin to believe that given all the possible choices of action, they would make the same decisions as the protagonist in moral and social dilemmas (Welch 205). The fables themselves are somewhat debatable in their efficacy as children's tales, but they are a significant portion of the history of literature for children because of their intent.

An author generally mentioned in the conversation regarding children's books is Margaret Wise Brown, a prolific author of books for children which continue to be popular in bookstores despite her death in the 1950s. Her works tend to center on anthropomorphized

animal characters in cozy, homely environments. *Goodnight, Moon*, which is arguably one of her most famous books, and commonly found on lists of highly impactful children's literature, has no central conflict in the manner described by Bettelheim, but manages to create a story which does not truly require high-stakes conflict to be engaging. In that way, *Goodnight, Moon* subverts the expectation of conflict in stories by replacing it with the comfort of the daily bedtime routine of a bunny. *The Important Book*, similarly, does not convey any conflict, but rather encourages introspection and appreciation. What children notice about different ordinary objects is directly related to appreciation of self because there are different aspects of themselves that children may notice, but their identity remains the same. *The Important Book* seeks to offer reassurance to children as they grow and change that they may have physical attributes and skills, but they remain appreciated, just as a spoon, or a shoe, or a daisy is appreciated for its identity. Many of Brown's other books, however, contain very slight conflict which drives exploration of emotions, particularly demonstrations and experiences of love. *Runaway Bunny*, for example, follows a young bunny seeking independence, but followed, almost haunted, by his mother. The young bunny of the story seeks to explore his new world, but his mother shadows him through each of his proposed adventures. There is comfort in the security of having a mother to supervise, to ensure safety and, to some degree, success, but the concept of being followed through every attempt at escape carries an odd sense of foreboding, even if the mother's intentions are pure. The conflict is not direct, but rather the story follows multiple failed escape attempts that lead back to the reassurance of being held and protected by a mother regardless of the distance. There is also comfort in the presence of a mother who, through tests, manages to love unconditionally.

Robert Munsch, on the other hand, centers his stories heavily on daily mischief and conflict as offered in a child's life. Perhaps his most well-known book is *Love You Forever* about

the enduring love a mother has for her child as he grows under her care. Regardless of the chaos the young boy creates, his mother continues to love him just as much as she always has. The conflict of this story is less pronounced; time is the only antagonist as both mother and son age, and consider the nature of their relationship as it evolves. While children may not consider time as abstractly, they do understand that passing time brings change, which remains a challenge they face when seeing their loved ones. Similar to Brown's *Runaway Bunny*, Munsch's *Love You Forever* offers comfort in the knowledge that despite the mother's frustration and the changes in both the boy and his mother, her love remains the same. Books like *Pigs* employ more humor to convey a message. The primary conflict in the story stems from the main character's arrogance, which very quickly returns to upset her regular plans. While a cursory examination of the story may reveal a simple resolution which equates to obeying one's parents to avoid the consequences of arrogant choices, a closer look opens a conversation about developing empathy. Empathic development is a critical stage in children's social development and a concern faced in daily life. There are some of Robert Munsch's works, however, that do not exist as daily issues for children, including one of the inspirations for the capstone project *The Paper Bag Princess*. Not only is the titular character of that work forced to confront abnormal conflict in that her betrothed is stolen by a dragon, but she manages to defeat the dragon with merely her wits. All of Robert Munsch's books, in fact, employ the main character's wits, intelligence, innovation, and courage as the primary tools of conflict resolution in the story.

More contemporary to this project, Christopher Denise's *Knight Owl* is a demonstration of conflict on a broader scale, not unlike Bettelheim's treatment of conflict, but contains a peaceful and happy resolution to a challenge that is realistic in the minds of children: fear of the dark and what it holds. The solution, for the main character Owl, lies in a combination of

bravery, determination, and compassion. The suspense exists in this story, but carries less overt fear than Bettelheim might imagine; the fear in *Knight Owl* is not sustained over several pages or encounters, but rather direct conflict occurs through only three pages. This is, in some ways, likely due to the nature of children's picture books and their design to deliver the full value of a plotted story in a short illustrated form. Because children's picture books do not carry the same implications as what J.R.R. Tolkien refers to it as a fairy story, it is reasonable for the suspense contained within them to span several pages of the story and the conflict to be limited to a brief passage in order to avoid causing excessive anxiety while providing exposure to fear and overcoming.

PICKLES THE FLYING PIG

By Lauren Kizer

Once there was a pig named Pickles. Pickles was a special pig: he had wings. All his family had wings. In fact, all the pigs on the island of Pigasus had wings.

The problem was Pickles didn't know how to use his wings. He could hardly get off the ground, so he fumbled more than flew.

Pickles, in a field, surrounded by his friends, some are flying and some are lounging in the grass

When Pickles was learning how to fly in school, all his friends were flying and using their new-found skills to play sports. Pickles desperately wanted to join them, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't fly. He was left out of sports and play time with his friends because his wings couldn't get him off the ground.

His friends tried to help him, but they had just learned to fly, too. They all made it seem so easy. They told him to flap his wings fast enough to get off the ground and then float until he started to fall. But his wings weren't very strong and rather small.

Pickles looking on forlornly as his friends fly around above him, in front of him is physics homework

He walked home one day after a flying lesson and asked his mom for advice. His mom advised caution, telling him not to fly too high because the winds could be strong and unpredictable. He tried taking her advice in flying classes, but he was so focused on not flying too high that his hooves never left the soft grass in the practice field.

Pickles speaking to his mother with wind visuals blowing in the background through the window

The next day he asked his dad for advice. His dad said “Trust your instincts. You are a flying pig, after all. Let your wings do the work.” In flying classes, Pickles tried to let his wings take over. But he could never stabilize his flight. And he fell. Again. And again. And again.

Pickles lying in the dirt, covered in mud surrounded by wildflowers in a field.

When he came home one night, he saw his brother, Patrick, and his friends playing air hockey. Patrick was a very skilled flying pig, and an even better air hockey player. Pickles wondered if his brother might be able to teach him to fly. But his brother seemed busy. Pickles watched his technique, but Patrick made it look so easy and effortless.

Pickles watching his brother pig fly around and play “air hockey”

So Pickles tried to teach himself, finding a small cliff that dropped down into a meadow full of soft grass. He jumped from the cliff, trying to use his wings, but every time he tried, he fell straight down into the grass. He fell again. And again. And again. By the time he trudged back to his house, he was covered head-to-hoof in mud and grass, and feeling rather discouraged. Maybe there was something wrong with his wings? But when he compared his wings to the rest of his family, they looked the same. And the rest of his family could fly just fine.

Pickles walking through the door covered in mud and grass and hay and debris

One night, when his brother was doing homework, Pickles asked how he learned to fly so well.

“Aunt Penny taught me,” Patrick said.

“Do you think she could teach me?” Pickles asked.

Patrick said, “I think she would love to, but she’s on the other side of Pigasus with her own family.”

Pickles laid on the floor in a shared bedroom while his brother sits at a desk, turned in the chair to face Pickles, his homework says “When Pigs Fly: How Airborne Pigs Overcome Psychological Challenges.”

Pickles wanted to cry. His parents couldn't help him. His teachers didn't know what to do. And the rest of the family was all the way across the island. It seemed no one could teach him to fly.

"But if you want, I might be able to help you," Patrick offered.

Pickles snorted with excitement. "Yes, please!" he said. "I want to fly like you."

Patrick smiled. "We can start tomorrow and work on the basics."

Pickles jumped up, looking excited in the same shared bedroom, while his brother sits at his desk with the same homework and smiles

The next morning, Pickles and Patrick went to the cliff where Pickles had fallen so many times. Pickles was afraid of trying and failing again, especially in front of his brother. He had worked so hard, and didn't want to fall again, or embarrass himself. Patrick told him to run up to the edge of the cliff and then spread his wings to glide down into the grass.

"I'm scared," Pickles said. "I don't want to keep falling."

"I won't let you get hurt," Patrick told him.

"Promise?" Pickles asked.

"Promise," Patrick swore.

Either Pickles peering over the edge of the small cliff looking concerned while Patrick looks on

When Pickles ran to the edge, Patrick ran with him, spreading his wings. Pickles glided steadily for a few seconds. Then he started to panic, falling through the air straight toward the ground until he felt something under his wing. Something that was steadying and lifting him.

He looked to his right and saw Patrick's wing tucked under his own, stabilizing his flight and guiding them both toward the ground.

Pickles looking toward Patrick, Patrick's wing under Pickles's smaller wing, hovering over the grass meadow.

Patrick set them gently on the ground. They walked back to the cliff to try again. When they got there, Patrick said, “Steady, kid. The wings are strong. Trust them.”

When Pickles tried again, he glided steadily to the ground, landing softly next to Patrick in the grass. He grinned, feeling light and excited about his progress for the first time since his friends had started flying.

Pickles gliding toward the grass, toward Patrick with a huge grin on his face.

Patrick spent the whole day working on wing exercises, rolls, turns, stops, take-offs, and landings.

They spent every day of the next few weeks working on basic skills and more advanced tricks. Some days, Pickles trudged back to the house sore and muddy, but smiling wide.

A month later, Pickles was confident in his flying skills, able to play with his friends, and travel anywhere he wanted to go on the island much faster than he ever could have walked.

Pickles kept practicing and improving, working with Patrick on strengthening his wings and learning new tricks. Even travelling to school, he worked on dips, dives, rolls, and new skills. He became one of the best athletes on the school air hockey team, helping his school win the championship.

Pickles flying with his friends, playing “air hockey” performing tricks and rolls during the game

As he got older, he got better and better, perfecting old skills and learning new ones. He became one of the most skilled flying pigs on Pigasus Island. When he started teaching piglets to fly, Pickles was known as the best flying teacher, always telling struggling piglets the same thing his brother had told him: “The wings are strong.”

An older Pickles, surrounded by little piglets, some flying unsteadily, some sitting around him, etc.

CONCEPT ILLUSTRATIONS





THOMAS AND THE DRAGON

By Lauren Kizer

Once there was a young boy named Thomas. Thomas was going to be a wizard. He had dreamed about it his whole life, reading books and newspapers, writing stories about wizards and dragons and fairies. He had pretended to be a wizard from the time he could hold a stick.

Toddler holding a twig, “casting a spell” on a frog in a yard

The best wizard school in the land was at the castle, a short walk from his own home. But being accepted into the school was difficult, future wizards needed to pass tests and trials of strength, skill, and wits to be admitted.

So Thomas studied.

Thomas sitting at a desk, surrounded by papers, books, potions, etc. Castle slightly elevated through a window in the background

When he wasn't writing for school or learning math, he was reading wizard books. He read every wizard book he could find. Books about real wizards, books about pretend wizards, books written by wizards, books read by other wizards. His favorite book was about Merlin and his adventures with King Arthur as the royal wizard. Every night his parents would read to him from *The Tales of Merlin*, and Thomas would fall asleep into dreams of dragons, and kings, and spells.

Thomas asleep in bed, the book lying beside him. Dream-style cloud above him with a dragon flying over a castle, and a wizard casting spells

When he was finally old enough to undergo the trials and prove he could be a wizard, he was first in line to sign up. He received top marks on each of his trials. In the trial of strength, he ducked and dodged, using his speed to get through the obstacles. He made his book appear in his hand from across the room in the skills test. He even got 100% on the test of wits. He did the same in wizard school. He was great at spelling, and building wands, and potions. He helped his classmates study for all their tests, lending them books from his personal collection.

He was less great at casting spells, almost setting his teacher's hair on fire, or blowing his own notes all through the halls, or turning his lab partner into a kitten.

So Thomas studied.

Sitting at another desk, the town outside the window in the background. Around him and on the desk is a wand atop a diagram, a spelling test pinned on the wall with words abracadabra, alacazam, etc., a bunsen burner with a bubbling potion in the windowsill, a kitten sleeping next to the potion in the windowsill, talismans (amulet, ring, etc.) used as paperweights for notes scattered around atop books, diagrams, charts, pens, quills, etc.

He practiced casting spells and using charms, staying in the lab late to make his demonstrations just right. By the time he was ready to graduate, he was amazing at all the things wizards needed to do. But when he was nervous, he would still accidentally send butterflies fluttering around the room or turn his pen invisible when he was startled.

Thomas in a classroom lab with a big blackboard showing a spell with a hand motion and his hand glowing with a ball of light. Butterflies flutter sporadically throughout the room

The final test of his ability to be a wizard was to take something from the lair of a dragon. Dragons were the most fearsome creatures in the land, and they loved their treasure. Each future wizard was sent out to different ends of the kingdom to find their own dragon lair and treasure. Thomas, of course, packed his favorite book, a few potions, and some snacks for his journey.

Items spread about Thomas's room and bed while he carefully puts them in a bag for the journey. Include a few books with The Tales of Merlin on top, notes, potions in different colors and shapes of bottle, a talisman, a couple snacks - a cookie in a bag with a note from Mom, etc.

Thomas wasn't scared, he was worried. He had studied how others had gained their treasures in the past, and he was unsure that those methods would work for him. Some used only potions to sneak in and out of the cave. Some tricked the dragon into sleeping while they took a single coin. Some took small pieces before the dragon could return to its hoard.

Thomas walking through the woods, eating a snack, a silhouette of a dragon flying distantly above

Thomas wasn't especially sneaky, or quiet, or strong. But he was smart and he was well-trained. When Thomas finally reached the cave in the area he had been assigned, he peered through the entrance from behind a rock. There was the dragon, asleep atop his great pile of treasure. There were coins and jewels, crowns and robes and wands. And there were books. Mixed in with all the riches were heaps of books. Thomas considered what he might take from the hoard: a coin, a jewel, a crown. He didn't need something big and flashy, just something to take with him. He had read about how other wizards had done it. He was willing to try their strategies, though they did make him a bit nervous.

The back of Thomas's head peering through the opening of a cave, with the dragon asleep on a pile of coins, crowns, swords, jewelry, etc. Books should be scattered in the treasure, with some wobbly and some stable stacks in the surroundings. A few butterflies scatter around.

Ani, the great palace wizard, had waited until the dragon was asleep and crept to the opening of the cave, twisted his hand to cast a spell, and levitated a single golden coin away from the pile of a dragon's hoard. Thomas tried this, closing his eyes and focusing all his attention on getting the spell just right. The coin was oddly heavy, and Thomas needed all his strength just to move it a few inches, straining under the weight. When he opened his eyes, the dragon was still asleep, hovering a very short distance above the pile of treasure. Thomas had picked up the whole dragon instead of one of the coins! Thomas panicked, sending the dragon crashing atop his hoard as coins and jewels tumbled everywhere. But the dragon slept on.

Thomas standing just inside the cave, the dragon asleep hovering over the piles of treasure

Morgan, a physician, had once turned herself invisible, crept into the lair and taken a silver necklace. Thomas whispered a spell from one of his books, one that turned him invisible to even the best eyesight, like a dragon's; Thomas couldn't even see his own hand in front of his nose. But he forgot that he didn't smell like a dragon. As soon as Thomas walked into the cave, the dragon sniffed. Thomas inched forward, hoping he would be ignored as a strange smell blown in on the wind. The dragon slunk toward him in his invisible state, his breath smelling of barbeque and smoke. Thomas backed into a corner, holding his breath and trying not to rattle the coins beneath his feet.

Thomas standing in the corner, his outline a little blue and mostly transparent as the dragon sniffs his face.

The dragon took a deep breath. And sneezed. Right in Thomas's face. Setting Thomas's hair smoldering and covering him in dragon snot. When the dragon turned away and settled again atop his treasure, Thomas ran out of the cave as fast as possible. Thomas dunked himself in the stream nearby and beat the embers from his hair and clothes.

Thomas's mostly invisible form, now covered in ash, running from the cave, his hair smouldering at the ends, and a sneeze shaped circle of ash on the wall where he had been standing, his outline left on the wall in clean stone.

The great wizard Alf had used a potion to make himself small as a mouse and made off with a ring settled on his head like a crown. Thomas took a potion from his bag, drinking it down. He began to shrink. And shrink. And shrink some more. When he finally stopped shrinking, he was about the size of a cricket. He snuck into the cave, having used the potion to disguise his scent. He came to the smallest piece of the hoard he could find: a jewel the size of a fingernail.

When he tried to pick it up, though, Thomas stumbled and fell. He pushed and pulled at the gem, but it wouldn't budge. It didn't move even a fraction of an inch from where it lay in the pile, no matter how Thomas heaved and shoved and rolled. Defeated, Thomas finally stumbled away, tiny and exhausted and without a single treasure.

Tiny Thomas pushing on a gem with all his might, face red, and the gem not moving a single inch.

Thomas slept that night under the stars. He had to wait hours for the potion to wear off, nibbling on cracker crumbs until he was big enough to bite the whole cracker. He hadn't considered that this final exam would be the hardest part of his journey to wizard-hood and earning his hat. Everyone else had seemed to do fine with the shrinking, and becoming invisible, and levitation. But Thomas's every attempt had failed, and he could think of nothing else to do. He was desperate to become a wizard and this last test was the only thing standing in his way.

Thomas staring at the stars, surrounded by the forest canopy, his head pillowed on his bag. The Tales of Merlin propped open on his chest

Disappointed at his own lack of ideas, Thomas pulled a book from his bag. Not the book on spells, or the one on potions. From his bag, he took the old, worn copy of *The Tales of Merlin*. Merlin had changed the appearance of his king to help in battle, had changed his own appearance to claim his treasure from a golden dragon, and had predicted great battles and successes. Merlin was Thomas's hero, even if Thomas didn't live in the forest as Merlin had. Thomas lay awake late into the night, reading about Merlin's adventures and triumphs, and when he fell asleep, he dreamed of himself as the great palace wizard.

Thomas asleep, dreaming of himself in his wizard's hat and robes, standing before the palace throne.

When he woke the next morning, instead of despair, Thomas felt only determination. He waited until he knew the dragon was awake, then grabbed his bag, and marched right into the cave.

“Who dares to enter my home?” The dragon roared so loud Thomas clapped his hands over his ears as the cave rattled.

“I’m Thomas,” Thomas said once his ears had stopped ringing. He rummaged in his bag with one hand, “And I’m here to make a trade.”

Thomas standing before the dragon, who is seated atop his treasure, one hand in his open bag, and the other pressed over his ear.

“You wish only to steal from me.” The dragon growled, then opened its mouth so wide, Thomas could count all of its teeth. His eyes stung from the bright light of the fire within, and his nose burned at the smell as flames bubbled up in the dragon’s throat.

“WAIT!” Thomas shouted, wrenching the well-loved and slightly battered copy of *The Tales of Merlin* from his bag. “What if we trade? This book for something of yours. I don’t need anything big or fancy.”

Perpendicular shot with the dragon’s face near Thomas’s, mouth open, and Thomas holding out his hand, with the book in one hand, face slightly turned away, and eyes squeezed shut.

“Hmm,” the dragon rumbled. “What would I gain from this book?”

“It would add to your collection. You seem to have a whole library of books, but you don’t have this one. This one is special.”

“Special?” the dragon snorted. “How is it special? An old child’s book?”

“It’s my favorite. My parents read it to me almost every night,” Thomas said quietly, remembering all the voices his parents would use for each character in the story.

“Is this book valuable? A piece of childhood that you have outgrown? I will only trade my treasure for something of equal value.”

Thomas held his hands in front of him, his fingers trembling slightly. “It’s very important to me, but I have it memorized. You could gain more knowledge from it, maybe share it with little dragons. All my best memories were with this book, but now I need your help.”

** Thomas imagining sitting on his bed with his parents, and them emoting in the voices of the story, holding the worn book open on the bed**

Thomas felt the dragon's rumble from the floor, through his boots, and all the way up to the tips of his hair.

The dragon considered his options. The boy offered knowledge he had never seen before in the form of this book. The dragon's collection of books was vast, but he did not have every book in the kingdom. There were many copies of some books, with different illustrations and the same stories. But this book, the book the boy offered. This book the dragon was drawn to. It was well-loved, the pages slightly bent, and the cover fading from being handled so often.

"I will accept your trade. You may have one of the books in my collection in exchange for yours, but only if you read your book to me as your parents read it to you."

Thomas blinked, shocked. "Why would a mighty dragon like you want to listen to me read?"

"I am older than I once was. My eyes do not work as well as they once did. But I want to know what story was so important to you."

A close-up of the book in Thomas's hands, faded and worn at the corners

So Thomas sat on the floor of the cave and read to the dragon, using all the voices his parents used to read the story to him.

Thomas sitting among the piles of treasure and books, reading the book in his lap while the dragon is curled on top of a pile of treasure, listening intently

And when he was finished, the dragon bid him farewell, while Thomas left with a new book, *George's Hoard*, about the treasures and journeys of George the Great Dragon, clutched to his chest.

When Thomas returned to the wizard school, his treasure was awarded the most unique as he was presented with his wizard's hat.

Thomas at the hatting ceremony, holding the book, with a purple, starry hat on his head.

CONCEPT ILLUSTRATIONS





THE PRINCE THIEF

By Lauren Kizer

Catherine was a princess. Her older brother James was a prince. James was Catherine's best friend. They played together every day in the castle gardens, battling imaginary dragons and witches and giants, sometimes even training their own skills using the planters as obstacles. They trained so much that Catherine was never without her practice sword, always prepared to slay imaginary monsters.

Catherine and her older brother running through a garden area with raised planters, carrying sticks as swords and knives. In the background, a wall and some really tall trees poking up past the battlements.

While they were playing one day, a cloud blew in front of the sun, casting shadows and distorting the light. Out of the corner of her eye, Catherine saw something flicker. She turned toward the flash but there was nothing there.

Catherine turned away from her brother, to look at a bush. Her brother looks at her curiously. In the background is the same palace garden, a little darker, clouds in the distance, and a menacing-looking shadow hovers in the background.

When Catherine turned back to her brother, he was sliding across the grass, being dragged backward by a shadow who seemed to slither along the ground.

“James!” Catherine cried, running after her brother as fast as she could.

James scrambled for something to hold on to, something to slow him down, but came away with handfuls of grass.

Catherine running after James. James sliding backwards, grabbing at the grass, being dragged by the shadow monster

Before Catherine could reach him, the shadow had climbed the wall and disappeared with her brother.

**James in the distance, dangling from his ankle as the shadow folds over the top of the wall.*

*Catherine sprinting across the lawn, but they're too far away.**

Catherine snatched up her practice sword and ran through the gardens, to the gate that led out into the woods at the back of the castle. The way her brother had gone. Shreds of his bright blue cape littered the path into the woods. Catherine followed the trail of blue until it became too dark for her to see.

Catherine running down a path in the woods, her practice sword in her hand, and a small pack slung over her shoulder. She is surrounded by woods, on a dirt path. Every few feet is a scrap of her brother's bright blue cape.

She found a log to sit on and pulled her coat from her bag. James had taught her to start a small fire in the woods to keep warm, but she didn't have any supplies. The chill of the night felt like ice burrowing through her coat. Over the trees, a short distance away, she saw smoke rising from a clearing.

Catherine sitting on a log, bundled in a coat and looking up through the trees toward some smoke rising in the distance.

Catherine decided to follow the smoke. Where there was smoke, there was usually fire, and fire would keep her warm. She thought the light of the fire might stop the shadows that had taken her brother from her.

Catherine bundled in her coat walking toward a glowing clearing that has smoke rising into the night sky.

When Catherine reached the clearing, she was shocked to see the smoke was not coming from a fire, not really. There was a huge bird with feathers the color of sunset that smoldered slightly, flames licking up its wings, but not lighting any of the brush or surrounding trees on fire. The smoke was coming from its mouth as it snored. But the bird radiated heat and Catherine continued to shiver in her thin coat.

The phoenix, asleep leaning against a tree, billowing smoke as it snores. Flames lick along its wings slightly, and it emits a slight glow all around. In the middle of the clearing is a stake with a rope attached, and the rope wrapped around the phoenix's claw.

Not wanting to wake the huge bird, Catherine settled a short distance away from its feet. That was when she noticed the bird's foot was caught in a rope anchored in the dirt near the center of the clearing. She didn't want the bird to be stuck, especially when she could help as it was helping her, even if it didn't know it. Catherine crept to the entangled foot and gently tugged at the knots keeping it trapped.

Catherine crouched at the bird's feet, tugging on the knot in the rope wrapped around one claw.

The bird suddenly came awake, squawking, “Who’s there?”

Catherine startled backwards, landing on her back side with an “oomph.” When she had gathered herself and dusted off her clothes, Catherine said, “My name is Catherine, Princess of Cyra.”

“And what are you doing here, Catherine, Princess of Cyra?” the bird asked.

Catherine sitting in the dirt, leaning on her hands as the phoenix’s wings flare slightly, and it comes awake. The clearing glows a little brighter as the flames on the wings grow slightly.

“Truthfully,” Catherine said, “I saw the smoke and thought I might keep warm by a fire. But then I saw your foot was stuck and was trying to help.”

The bird eyed her thoughtfully. “My name is Serafine. I am a phoenix of the bloodline Eragus.” Serafine lifted her head proudly. “Perhaps my claw is wrapped up for a reason.”

“Who did this?” Catherine asked, raising her eyebrows.

Serafine dropped her head. “It got caught while I was chasing a rabbit that stole my apple.”

Catherine standing at Serafine’s feet. Serafine’s foot is still wrapped up in the rope anchored to the center of the clearing.

“May I help you?” Catherine asked quietly.

“Yes, please.” Serafine raised pleading eyes to look at Catherine.

Catherine crouched and tugged at the knots. When the rope snagged on her fingernails, she took the edge of her practice sword and sliced through the knot holding Serafine’s foot captive.

“How can I repay you?” Serafine asked, gently nudging Catherine’s arm.

“I’m looking for my brother. A shadow monster took him from the palace gardens. I’ve been following the scraps of his coat, but I haven’t found him yet.”

Catherine crouched with the practice sword in her hand, slicing through the knot at Serafine’s foot.

“A shadow monster! I’ve seen it. It attaches itself to princes so it can walk in the light, but then causes chaos in different kingdoms. The shadow controls their movements, so the princes can’t go anywhere without the shadow. Without a prince to attach itself to, the monster is stuck in the dark.” Serafine huffed smoke from her beak.

“Do you know where it is?” Catherine asked.

“I saw it under the cliffs by the coast a few days ago. It may still be there. We can go there in the morning, but first you must sleep and get warm.”

“I suppose,” Catherine mumbled reluctantly. She curled up under Serafine’s fiery wing, marveling at the way the flames warmed but didn’t burn.

Catherine curled under Serafine’s wing, watching with wonder as the flames smolder along the feathers.

Catherine woke as the sun rose, warm and rested, nestled in Serafine's feathers as they rustled slightly around her. "Good morning!" Serafine said cheerfully. "Let's go get your brother."

"How do we get there?" Catherine asked, slightly turned around from her walk through the woods in the dark.

Serafine tucked her wings in, and crouched down, creating a ramp. "Climb on."

When Catherine settled on Serafine's back, they took off with a jolt and Catherine buried her fingers in the smoldering feathers under her hands.

Catherine on Serafine's back, her hands in the feathers near the back of the neck as Serafine launches from the clearing.

As they soared toward the sparkling blue of the ocean, Catherine began to wonder how she would rescue her brother from the shadow monster. “Do you know of any princes who have returned from the shadow monster?” Catherine had to shout over the rushing wind.

“I don’t know many princes. But the shadow monster avoids light, so I may be able to help.” Serafine and Catherine created a plan for when they found James and how they would get him away from the shadow monster.

Catherine riding Serafine. The ocean sparkles in the distance past the cliffs.

Serafine landed at the base of the cliffs, creating a cloud of sand as she landed. They had decided to wait until night to approach the cave where James was being held, so they settled in the bushes at the base of the cliffs.

Serafine and Catherine tucked against the base of tall cliffs, the water on one side, the rocks on the other. They are disguised by scrubby bushes. An open cave mouth sits a short distance away from them.

When it was completely dark, Catherine walked to the cave mouth alone, and pressed herself to one side. Serafine came a few moments later, flames flaring bright against the night. The phoenix marched straight to the cave opening.

Catherine snuck into the cave behind Serafine, tucking herself just under one flaming wing.

Serafine standing, glowing bright, at the cave mouth. Catherine is pressed to the rock right outside the entrance, watching Serafine approach

And there Catherine saw her brother, facing a shadow that flickered in Serafine's flames.
The shadow monster backed away from the glow.

"Back up, James!" Catherine warned.

James stepped to the far corner of his enclosure, and Serafine sent a small ball of flame to the lock on the cage, melting it entirely.

James pressed to the corner of a cage, the lock red-hot and dripping molten metal on the cave floor. The shadow slithering along the floor away from Serafine.

Catherine pushed against the bars of the cage, forcing the door inward.

“Catherine!” James breathed as he rushed to her, pulling her into a tight hug. “Thank you.”

“Let’s go,” Catherine said, pulling him toward the cave mouth. Serafine spread her wings, protecting their retreat from the cave, glowing brighter as she backed away.

Catherine and James hug, the semi-melted cage door in the background. Serafine stands in the background, wings spread and glowing bright. The shadow monster cowers in the darkest corner of the cave.

As soon as they were all out of the cave, Catherine and James sprinted through the sand, and Serafine lumbered behind them, her flames lighting the beach ahead of them. When they were far enough from the cave, Serafine stopped and dipped her wings for them to climb on. James seemed nervous, but he trusted his sister more than he feared the fire.

Catherine and James running along the beach, Serafine running behind them, glowing and lighting up the beach ahead.

Serafine flew them all the way back to the palace, and as the sun came up, they climbed down in the same garden where James had been taken. Serafine gave brother and sister one of her glowing, golden feathers. “If you ever need me again, burn this feather, and I will find you,” Serafine said.

Catherine brushed the feathers on Serafine’s neck.

James bowed. “Thank you, my friend, for helping to rescue me. And for keeping Catherine safe.”

Serafine nuzzled Catherine’s cheek then launched toward the sunrise.

Serafine flying into the sunrise. Each child is holding one burning golden feather, watching as she flies away

CONCEPT ILLUSTRATIONS





EXPERIENCES

Following this exploration of children's literature in its many forms and the elements that create wonder in these stories, I authored three children's books intended to incite the same kind of wonder available in books like *The Paper Bag Princess*, *Knight Owl*, *Narnia*, and *Goodnight Moon*. The initial concepts drew inspiration from the books included in the research in order to extract the vital essence in creating wonder. Each of the three books was directed toward a different age group and therefore required different story-telling methods. The order in which the books were written is evidence of my evolution as an author as the stories become more complex in nature and progress toward increasing wonder with each book.

Pickles the Flying Pig was written first, but it was the last to be conceptualized. The story is the simplest of the three because it was intended for a younger readership, ages three to five, appealing to the audiences of board books. Writing about a flying pig required inventing an obstacle that addressed an issue children consider, especially at the age of the intended audience, but was not so complex that it necessitates magical solutions to overcome. If magic was a requirement for Pickles to learn, the plot can easily become discouraging to a young audience hoping to see themselves in the characters they read about. I do not agree with Rousseau that children are incapable of understanding complex plotlines, but the types of stories that require magical solutions can become convoluted enough to be disengaging for a young audience. The magic of a flying pig also needed to be embedded in the world enough to be believable and incite the wonder and joy of learning to fly, of the first success. For the story to work, the audience needed to participate in the successes and failures of a flying pig, which informed both the language and art style of the book. By appealing to the imagination in the same way Tolkien says is necessary in "On Fairy Stories" and embracing the "secondary belief," Pickles became a

character with enough believability situated in his world because there was an expectation of magic and flying pigs. The goal of creating Pickles was to approach the younger audience, respecting their understanding of their environments while building wonder at a fictional world.

Thomas and the Dragon needed to maintain the same kind of respect for a child's comprehension while addressing a slightly older audience. Thomas's story was the first idea in this collection and therefore matured the most in terms of the storytelling process. Thomas was designed for the younger end of the age range for picture books, between the ages of three and six. Thomas needed to be a more complex character with a more challenging task. I wanted Thomas's story to address a relevant challenge children would face in early elementary school, namely conformity and imitation, but approach in a way that did not create fear of learning from others. Thomas tries what has worked for others in the past in order to avoid criminalizing gaining inspiration from others, but creates his own solution to encourage independent thinking and problem-solving skills. I also wanted to avoid the solution to Thomas's dilemma being arbitrarily or superficially magical for the sole purpose of adding magic; I wanted magic to be normalized in the story without attributing all success to the existence and application of magical outcomes. To accomplish this, I made Thomas excellent at magic and overcoming the magic challenges presented in the academic setting, but all his knowledge of magic could not be the ultimate solution. Making the solution to Thomas's problem magical when his skills with magic are advanced would effectively undercut any possible character growth that occurred prior to his success and neutralize the story's value, returning it to mere entertainment for its own sake. By employing a non-magical solution to a fantasy world, I was able to enhance the impact of what Tolkien labelled the recovery or the "regaining of a clear view" that returned the experience of wonder to the reality of the environment (Tolkien 28).

The Prince Thief was the final book completing the progress of story-telling. It was both the last to be imagined and the last to be executed. Because it was born of the combination of successes and failures of the previous two books, this was by far the most advanced in the creation of wonder and the fulfillment of the story. *The Prince Thief* was created for the older side of the range for picture books, targeted at readers aged six to eight. For that reason, the characters act on more complex motivations. Less emphasis is placed on the integration of magic because readers at this age require less convincing to accept the magic of the fictional world. This also made it possible to introduce what is considered a lesser-known mythical creature as a main character and create multiple creatures with characteristics less strictly defined in modern and accessible media. As opposed to a dragon, which is well-known and is easily identified by its physical characteristics, a phoenix, also known as a firebird, and a loosely defined “shadow monster” are more abstract concepts. By integrating multiple mythical characters who oppose one another and represent opposite sides of a spectrum, in this case the light and dark spectrum, the storyline possesses higher stakes with the possibility of a more magical calamity. For the same reason as in *Thomas and the Dragon*, I sought to avoid employing magic for the sake of magic. The wonder in *The Prince Thief* exists in the creatures and characters themselves, offering a more nuanced perspective of reality through the lens of light, dark, bravery, kindness, and motive. Superfluously adding magical demonstrations to a world in which magic is normalized cheapens the personalities of the main characters to the point of being flat and unremarkable.

To avoid these issues of superficial magical solutions and unnecessarily demonstrating magic, I worked to create characters who accepted and embraced the magic of their surroundings, but possessed human characteristics which motivated them to complete their

individual quests. Each of the books would likely have been much simpler to write if the plot of each had been executable by the use of magic and magic alone. The initial draft of *Thomas and the Dragon* had a somewhat ambiguous ending which explicitly did not use magic to solve his problem with the dragon. With each proposal and draft of the book, the non-magical ending changed slightly to communicate a slightly different message. The magical elements and attempts, however, remained consistent across the drafts because they were not intended to have a specific moral implication in their inclusion. The overarching message of the book remained constant throughout the drafting process, but the underlying message communicated in what precise technique Thomas used to persuade the dragon changed to suit the development of the character through the editing process. *Pickles the Flying Pig* remained almost unchanged through the drafting process because there exists no overt magic beyond the expectation of accepting the characters are winged pigs. For that reason, Pickles as a character was much simpler to understand because his story did not possess the moral and thematic complication that accompanies the introduction of overt magic systems. The same can be said of *The Prince Thief* because the magic exhibited in that is not the same type of overt magic as is present in *Thomas and the Dragon*. While Serafine, the phoenix, and the shadow monster are intrinsically magical, none of the characters execute magic for the purpose of moving the plot forward. It is that process of separating the existence of magic from the plot which allowed me to avoid superficial magic solutions for complex problems.

While I recognize that I could not create a story that was as iconic or culturally important as all those studied in the course of this project, I wanted to embody the spirit of children's literature in my work in a way that honored those who came before and employed the elements that made their works so deeply impactful. This required deconstructing the nature of the books

each author wrote in an effort to establish a list of elements and their interactions which contributed to the impact and wonder they had created. The conflict in each of the stories required some kind of sustained stakes in order to adequately engage with a young audience who tend to have little tolerance for boredom or verbose narratives. Each book also required a compelling main character. Compelling, in this capacity, implies something wildly different than what may be imagined in literature for adults, leading rather away from deeply complex and conflicted characters and toward characters who are relatable in their representation of the challenges they face. The character's experience of the conflict is equally as important as the conflict itself. For the same reasons I avoided arbitrary magical remedies, wonder in the works I studied often employed magic as an element of the world, but not the central component of the resolution. In a fictional world which imagines magic as something natural, magic would be a tool but would not represent the universal solution for all problems in the world. It is from these elements that I formulated each of the stories in an effort to emulate the type of wonder, joy, and nostalgia that such popular children's books are capable of inciting in a manner which draws readers to "read the story or re-read it, at any age," (Lewis, "On Three Ways" 52). Compiling these elements introduced me to the process of writing for children and the considerations necessary for effectively employing the medium of children's books to communicate a message which is relevant and accessible to the target audience while embedding Tolkien's principles of fantasy, recovery, consolation, and escape to return wonder to reality.

Many of the challenges of creating a children's book surround concerns about appropriateness and efficacy. As Lewis notes, the best way to write a children's story is by considering whether a children's story is the most appropriate way to communicate the story one wants to tell ("On Three Ways" 52). One of my many considerations was how realistic to make

the content, especially the illustrations. Bettelheim would argue that the story should be as challenging as possible because children need not be sheltered from fictional worlds (52). Rousseau would counter that children cannot comprehend stories that are too complex and would interpret the story in ways outside of the author's intent (Welch 205). I rather fall squarely between Bettelheim and Rousseau: I believe children should be exposed to complex stories because they are capable of interpretation and creative reasoning, but they should not be so struck by the realism of a story that it becomes terrifying. The real challenge, then, is balancing significant stakes in conflict with the wonder and comfort offered in stories like *Goodnight, Moon*. In order to communicate the intended message, the story needed reasonable stakes, compelling characters, effective and age-appropriate story-telling techniques, and illustrations that demonstrated the wonder of the story being told. The process of managing each aspect was delicate and required multiple drafts and revisions to effectively execute.

Perhaps the most complex challenge was the illustration of each story. Each book has a few concept pieces associated with the story in the style intended for the book and detailed descriptions for the rest of the story. Wonder is a concept that extends beyond the words of the book and to the pages and illustrations. Before children can read, they learn and remember images. The illustrations, therefore, needed to capture the wonder of the story in a way that suited the personality of each book and main character, which involved conversations about the efficacy of realism, color theory, and avoiding overemphasizing fear to balance the written stakes of the plot. Each illustration was created with a different style and medium to match the characters and goal format of the story. Pickles, for example, was created to be watercolored and employ looser shapes, but bright colors to appeal to the expected audience of a board book. Thomas's story was intended to be slightly darker, but with bright contrasts in the style of

Michael Martchenko's illustrations for Rober Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* with simple shapes and vibrant characters created in colored pencil. Catherine and Serafine were the most complex, with high contrast illustrations, defined shapes, and smooth blends in the style of digitally imitated oil paints. Illustrations and style decisions were intended to target the appropriate audience based on the format of the book and the maturity of those experiencing the book.

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