“Looking back on family pictures, I’d also say that I am partial to pirates. For my nine year-old son’s first Halloween, we dressed him as a pirate. I remember desperately wanting a pirate themed bedtime book for him. There were lots of terrific pirate themed books already out, but none set at bedtime. Six years later, I wrote the pirate themed bedtime book I was looking for. ‘Pirates Lullaby: Mutiny at Bedtime’ was well received in class and one of my instructors encouraged me to expand and revise the story to fit the 32-page picture book format.” — Marcie Rinka-Wessels, author

Characters and setting have a reciprocal relationship. One feeds off of the other. Every aspect, from their surroundings, the way they touch objects, and the social rules about their world and its inherent consistency, gives us context as to how to view what’s going on. Each character in a group would have different reactions to the same situation. Note how a toddler, a dog, a tool-laden plumber, a princess, or a whale would amble into a grocery store. A skilled illustrator sketches each character completing an action, step-by-step, as part of their research and development.

At the core of each picture book is compression. There are only 32 pages! Much of a story’s setting can be implied or inferred through visual suggestion. What is left out is just as significant as what is implicitly shown. The best picture book text is as minimal as the best prose poetry.

The drawings themselves must be simple, as decisions are made along the way. Many artists will enlarge their dummy drawings, using them as templates to create their finished drawings. They will work directly with the publisher’s in-house art director or designer, to fine-tune details while advising on art media, color palette, and its reproduction quality from painted image to the printed page. It must all be produced to industry standards.

The advent of digital tools increases the effective collaboration between editor and author, illustrator and designer. It doesn’t all end when the artist hands over their work. There’s behind-the-scenes technical preparation — layouts, color proofing, plus reviewing and technical checking in between. Meanwhile publicity and marketing plans are drawn up.

Printing of an entire season’s worth of books is scheduled on a massive scale. It can take two full years from the time an author hands in a finished picture book manuscript, to when a completed book with illustrations is off press, printed, and bound. And no two books will look, feel, or sound alike.

This exhibition is made possible by the drive and passion of many picture book creators. Many thanks to the authors, artists, editors, and their respective publishing houses for making their personal process, inspirations, original works, and book videos available for us to share. You are all an inspiration!