



## What DO authors and illustrators do?

Following are suggestions of ways to discuss that question. Many of these ideas were developed for the Vermont Red Clover Award program -Vermont's Children's Choice Picture Book Award. I had a small part in helping to develop the program as I was writing my 'author and illustrator books'.

## Study the work of a favorite author:



If they have several books, plan an 'Author Week', comparing and contrasting their different books. Start by reading and discussing *What Do Authors Do?*

## Looking at a story - a few questions to consider:

- What is the story about?
- What is the most exciting part of the story?
- Read the first couple of pages. Do they make you want to continue reading the story? Why? or Why not?
- Do you like the characters? Would you choose any to be your friend? Why? or Why not?
- Does the author use a lot of words? Few words?
- What words does the author use to describe some of the characters? To describe action? To describe the setting?
- Do the illustrations help tell the story?
- Do the illustrations tell you anything the words do not?
- Read several of the author's stories. Are they all funny? . . . or sad? How are they different? How are they the same?

## Study the work of a favorite illustrator:



If they have several books, plan an 'Illustrator Week', perhaps working with the school art teacher. Compare and contrast the different books. Start by reading and discussing *What Do Illustrators Do?*

Some illustrators, like me, write their own stories. Many do not. Usually authors have little, if any, opportunity to make comments or suggestions to the illustrator. They can talk to the editor or art director who may or may not convey their suggestions to the illustrator.

### **Discuss the author's point of view:**

How would it feel for an author to have very little input about how her book will look?

### **Discuss the illustrator's point of view:**

Would she want an author to tell her how to illustrate?

## Looking at the illustrations-a few questions to consider:

- What media did the illustrator use to make these illustrations? (If you aren't certain, you can often find this information buried in the Library of Congress information at the front of the book.)
- Does the illustrator draw the pictures with lines? Are the lines thick? thin? Are they outlines? Are they broken lines? Does the illustrator make texture with lines? Shadows?
- What tool was used to draw the lines? Pencil? Pen? Brush?
- Some illustrators don't use lines. They might use just color. Find some examples.
- Find examples of the illustrator's work in different books she has illustrated. Does the illustrator always do the illustrations the same way?-use the same technique?
- Find an illustrator who uses white space around their pictures. Does white space make the pictures easier to see?
- Do the illustrations have lots of detail? Very little detail? Show your students examples of both styles.
- Do skies always have to be blue? Is dirt always brown? Are trees always green? Take a look-you might find some surprises. Maybe the illustrator uses a combination of colors or colors you would not have thought of using.
- Find a quiet story. Are the illustrations done with soft, quiet colors?
- Find an energetic, fast moving story. What colors does the illustrator use? Are the illustrations energetic and active?

## How is the Book Designed?



### Looking at book design-a few questions to consider:

- What shape is the book? Is it big? Is it small? If you are studying several books by the same author, are the books all the same shape? Different shapes? Does the shape and the size work with the illustrations?
- Look at the typefaces used in the book for the text and the title. Are the typefaces different? How are they different? Are there silly, funny or playful typefaces? Are there serious typefaces?
- Does the cover of the book tell you something about the story? What does it tell you?
- Look at the end papers. Sometimes they are illustrated. Sometimes they are colored paper. If the end papers are colored, why do you think they are that color? Do they pick up or complement another color in the book?

### Same story-different author and illustrator: Will they tell it the same way?

Many author/illustrators retell and illustrate favorite fairy tales. Find several examples of the same tale-for instance, there are at least six versions of Little Red Riding Hood. I found two or three versions of Jack and the Beanstalk when I was working on my book about illustrators. Read all of the versions and discuss the similarities and differences in both the text and illustrations, using some of the questions listed above. -A classroom project from a school in Vermont

In conjunction with this project, read *What Do Authors Do?* and *What Do Illustrators Do?* Both books look at different ways authors and illustrators might approach the same story.

### Meet an author:

#### Invite an author to visit your school:

Who publishes the author you'd like to invite? Most publisher's publicity departments should be able to help you contact that author. Often a good children's bookstore can be helpful too.

Author visits are not cheap and are only worth doing if everybody in the school, students and teachers, are well prepared! Get together with another school in your district and share travel and lodging expenses.

#### Visit an author's web site:

If you would like a good index of 'authors on the web', try: *Children's Literature Web Guide*

Also read: *Book Links*, (September 1998)