

Illustration as Art—Color

by Mary M. Erbach

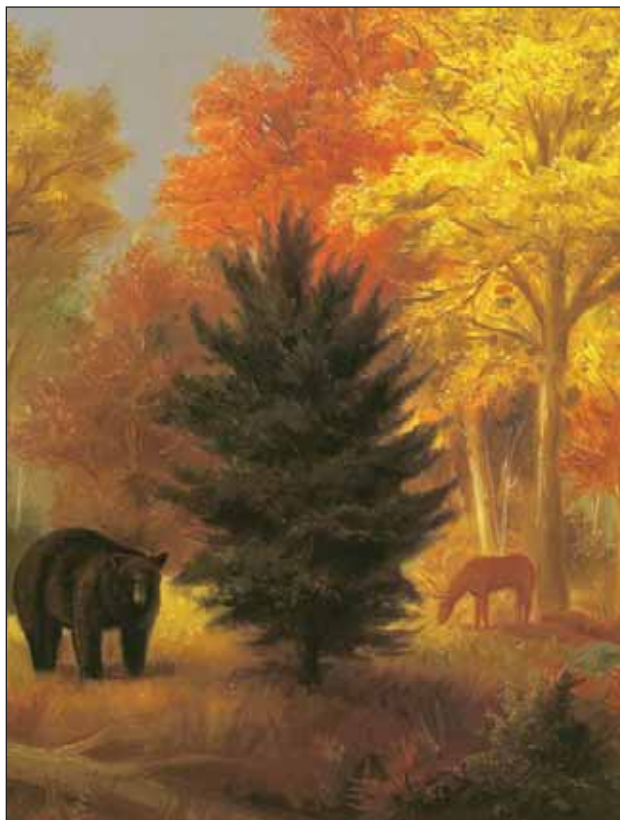
“Illustration as Art” is a series of articles designed to help adults become more confident in discussing art with children. Inspired by an article series published in Book Links in 1994–95, this regular feature will cover styles of children’s book illustration and aspects of book design, and will help both children and adults gain a greater appreciation for art as they learn to look and look again, taking time to digest and explore this wonderfully varied subject. —Ed.

This first “Illustration as Art” article will concentrate on the aspect of color in pictures. Picture-book artists use color to bring focus to the elements in a story, adding emphasis to a character, suggesting a mood, and contributing to the aesthetics of a visual experience.

Here are seven artists who use color in different ways. When sharing these books with children, explore how color helps tell the story. Look at other books by these artists and compare the various techniques. Finally, try out some simple color theory experiments with the “Hands-On Learning” suggestions available on the *Book Links* Web site.

Hands-On Learning

For “Hands-On Learning” activities designed to accompany a discussion of these books, visit the *Book Links* Web site at <http://www.ala.org/BookLinks> and click on “Web Connections.”



Bruchac, Joseph, and Jonathan London. *Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back: A Native American Year of Moons.* Illus. by Thomas Locker. 1992. 32p. Philomel, \$16.99 (9780399221415); Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780698115842).

Native American cultures correlate the 13 moons in a year to the 13 scales found on the back of a turtle and associate a story with each one. Thomas Locker illustrates this collection of nature poems based on the different moons with wondrous seasonal landscape paintings.

This story of the tenth moon, Moon of Falling Leaves, explains why some trees turn colors in the fall while others stay green. Long ago, the trees were asked to stay awake for seven days and nights, but only the cedar, the pine, and the spruce were able to do so. As a reward, they remain green throughout the year. In Locker’s illustration, glowing woods feature orange-leaved trees accented with burgundy, brick red, and brown. Shades of yellow mixed with tans and light browns combine to create the brightest trees. A heavy gray sky acts as a backdrop, accentuating the vivid colors, as do the deep green and dark shadowed tones of the evergreen.

Ehlert, Lois. *Waiting for Wings*. 2001. 40p. Harcourt, \$17 (9780152026080).

Artist and author Lois Ehlert makes the “ingredients” for her illustrations by painting sheets of color and textures on white paper. After these papers dry, she cuts out pieces and constructs collages.

Invite children to find flowers in this illustration that are slightly different in color but similar in shape and share the same design in the center. Look for a plant that has various stages of growth, from a flower bud peeking out of the green to full blooms. Find a textured purple flower center. It looks like Ehlert crinkled the paper before she started painting on it, and the paint pooled in the folds, drying darker. Are there other areas that look like this?

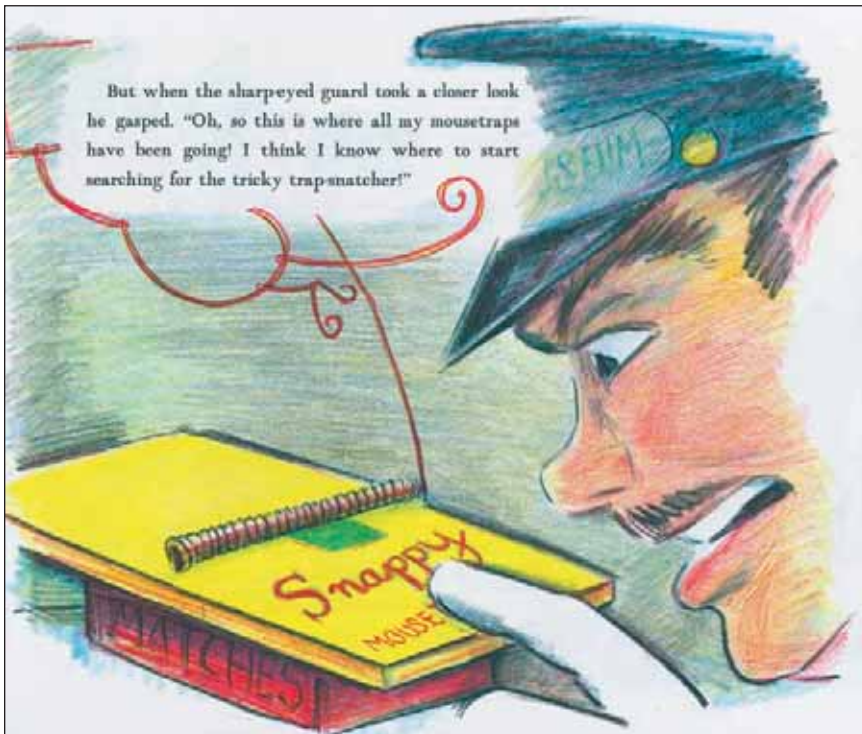
Examine the butterflies on this page. As you ask children to name the shades of colors found on their wings, encourage them to be specific, discerning orange from tangerine, salmon, coral, melon, or peach, developing a richer vocabulary of color names.



Freeman, Don. *Norman the Doorman*. 1959. 64p. Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (9780140502886).

On this page of Don Freeman’s classic story about Norman the mouse, the museum guard has just discovered that Norman turned one of his mousetraps into a work of art and entered it in the museum’s sculpture contest. Our focus goes to the brightest color on the page, the yellow base of the trap, now supporting a sculpture by Norman. Freeman liked to include words as part of the art, and frequently throughout the book words are sketched out in different typography. How many words are sketched on this page?

The drawings look as if Freeman drew them directly on the pages of the book. We can see every stroke drawn. The close-up of the guard’s face shows the blending of yellow, red, and blue. Black squiggles representing hair mark the moustache, sideburns, and eyebrows of the guard. Examine the other pictures in the book. See what colors are layered over each other to create shadows, walls, and floors.



Lauture, Denizé. *Running the Road to ABC*. Illus. by Reynold Ruffins. 1996. 32p. Simon & Schuster/Aladdin, paper, \$6.99 (9780689831652).

This story is set on the lush tropical island of Haiti. Before dawn, when the world is dark and asleep, a group of children wake up, eat breakfast, and begin a long journey to school. As the pages turn, the sun comes up and the setting's colors become even more alive.

In this illustration the children have begun their journey, and a deep purple sky is dotted with tiny white stars. The land is patterned with different crops, and green wavy leaves in the foreground wiggle up at an angle, glistening with dots of light blue dew. The children are positioned rhythmically on the page, each holding a multicolored lunch sack and a brown book bag made of palm leaves. One of the children wears an orange shirt, adding contrast. Discuss and identify the patterns in this story, and explore how the children in this book become a pattern themselves.



Moss, Lloyd. *Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin*. Illus. by Marjorie Priceman. 1995. 32p. Simon & Schuster, \$17.95 (9780671882396); Aladdin, paper, \$6.99 (9780689835247).

Marjorie Priceman's double-page paintings are filled with background color from edge to edge and act as backdrops to stage this Caldecott Honor Book story. One by one, members of an orchestra appear on stage with their instruments. Fine black brushstrokes add detail to the musicians and their instruments, and playful animals swirling in color join the musical rehearsal. The spontaneous lines of the characters' profiles and costumes are reminiscent of Toulouse Lautrec's cabaret scenes.

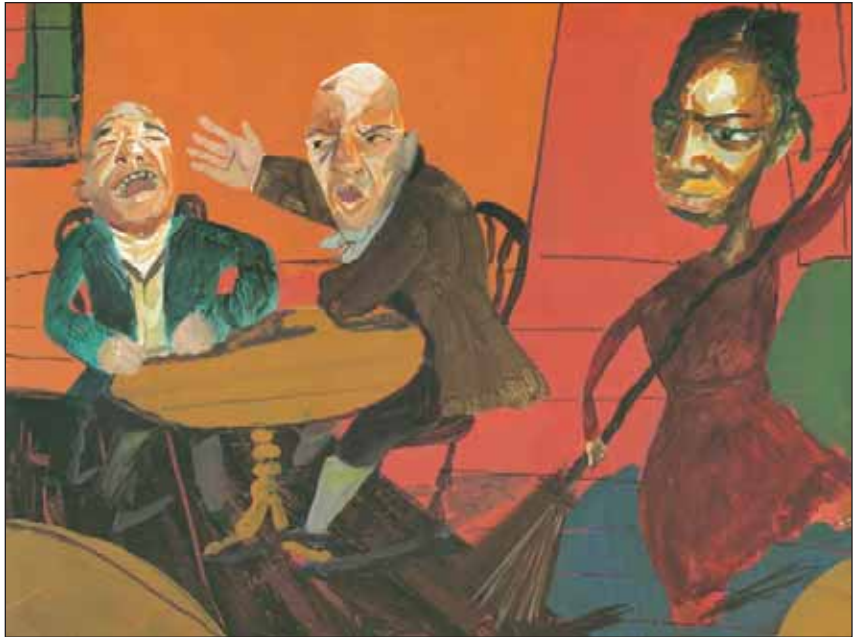
A magenta and peach backdrop fills this illustration, as a swirling musician dressed in purple blows her trumpet. In the background, a man in a black top hat and tuxedo plays his trombone, while gray and orange cats stretch and lick. Thin black lines emphasize the musical notes and a thick gold tassel holding back a coral drape.



Rockwell, Anne. *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth*. Illus. by R. Gregory Christie. 2000. 40p. Knopf, \$16.95 (9780679891864); Dragonfly, paper, \$6.99 (9780440417668).

Broad strokes, dabs, and fine lines of color define compositions in this picture-book biography for older children. Note the different brush sizes that Christie uses in various areas, and what direction the brushstrokes are going. Where are there smooth tones, and where are there textures?

In this illustration, Christie uses two tones of orange for the background and divides them with a thin pencil line drawn at an angle. The young Sojourner is holding a broom and sweeping, her body surrounded by green and turquoise. These shades are repeated on the jacket of the laughing man and outside the window in the corner of the painting. Whites and lighter tones bring focus to the faces of the three characters, emphasizing their expressions and emotions. Notice how Christie's backgrounds are more abstract, allowing the characters to take main stage.



Young, Ed. *Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China*. 1989. 32p. Philomel, \$16.99 (9780399216190); Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780698113824).

Ed Young's Caldecott-winning watercolor and pastel drawings accompany this story set in the countryside of northern China.

In this three-panel illustration, the sisters have unknowingly allowed a clever wolf into their home, thinking he is their grandmother. A striking close-up of the wolf's face becomes almost abstract, and its large scale suggests danger and alarm. Orange,

yellow, blue, green, and purple pastel lines represent hairs of the wolf's fur. The blackness of the night above and a colorful bluish blanket below act as a frame for the wolf's face, showing a large, alert eye outlined in black; flaring nostrils; and white teeth that get lost in the blanket design.

Mary M. Erbach is the assistant director of interpretive exhibitions and family programs at the Art Institute of Chicago.