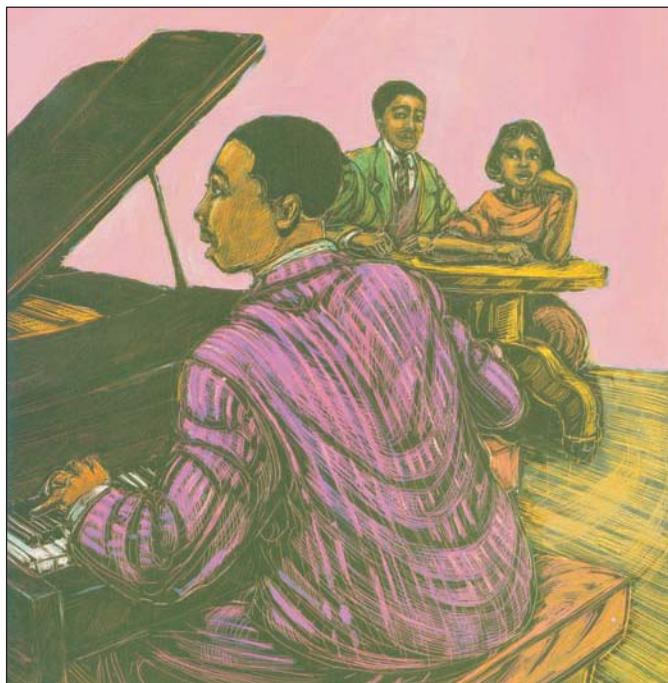


Illustration as Art— Technique

The fourth installment in a series that focuses on learning to look at and being able to understand and articulate what is seen in works of art, this article examines the materials and techniques used by seven different artists. **By Mary M. Erbach**

The visual power of an illustration lies in the combination of its lines, colors, and shapes arranged to produce a dynamic composition. The method in which the art is created also contributes to the force of the image. Though they are reproductions in their final form, original picture-book illustrations are often textured and are different in scale from the page of the printed book. Their creation can also be quite involved. Although the intended audience for a particular picture book may be very young, viewers of all ages can study and appreciate the skill and talent required in making the pictures.



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.”

Also note that previous “Illustration as Art” articles are available for download on the **Book Links Web** site. To access them, visit <http://www.ala.org/BookLinks> and click on “Archive of Online Articles,” then select “Subscriber Favorites.”

Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra. By Andrea Davis Pinkney. Illus. by Brian Pinkney. 1998. 32p. Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, \$15.95 (9780786801787); paper, \$5.99 (9780786814206).

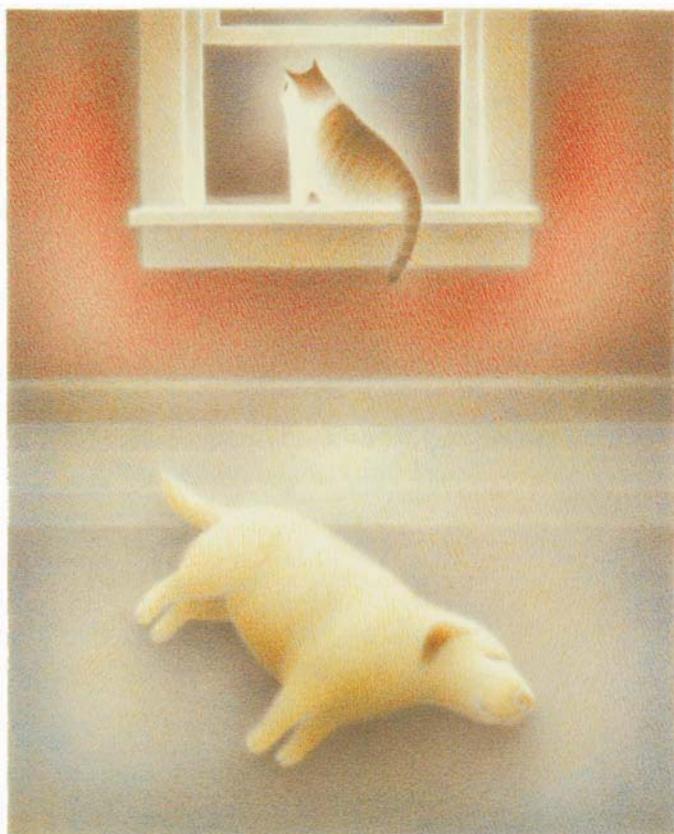
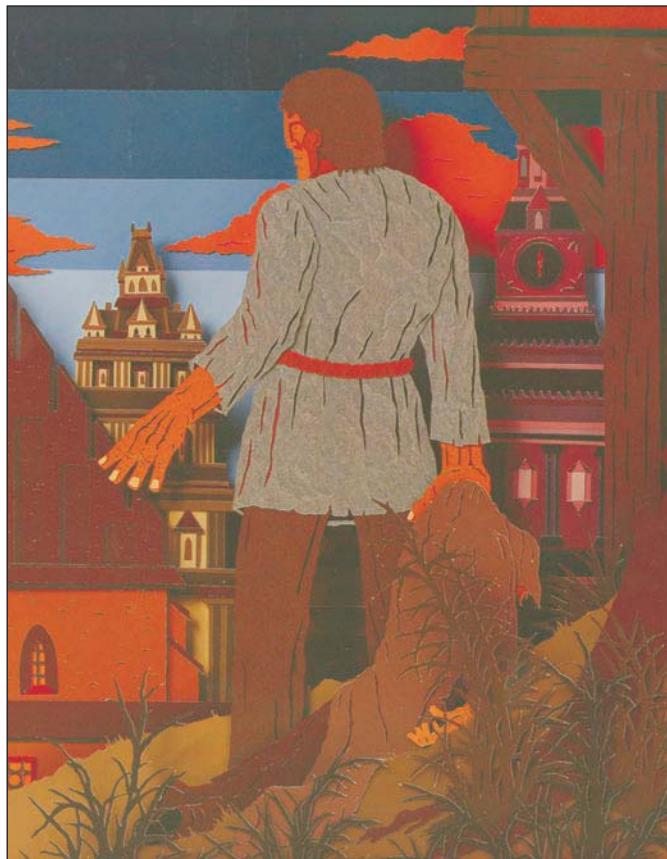
In this Caldecott Honor Book, Brian Pinkney develops and refines his signature illustration style utilizing scratchboard, a clay-coated board covered with black ink. First Pinkney makes sketches of the basic composition, and then the finished drawing is lightly transferred to the surface of the board. Using a variety of sharp tools, he scratches away the black ink surface and exposes the white clay. Instead of adding lines to create shadows and depth (as in Geisert’s etching process, below), Pinkney adds light to the picture as he removes the dark surface. He finishes the illustration by painting vibrant colors over the white areas that contrast with the black ink.

In this illustration of a young Duke Ellington, lines flow and sway in the same direction, creating ripples in Ellington’s shirt and in the wood grain of the floor, reinforcing the melodic music coming from the piano.

Golem. By David Wisniewski. 1996. 32p. Clarion, \$17 (9780395726181); paper, \$6.95 (9780618894246).

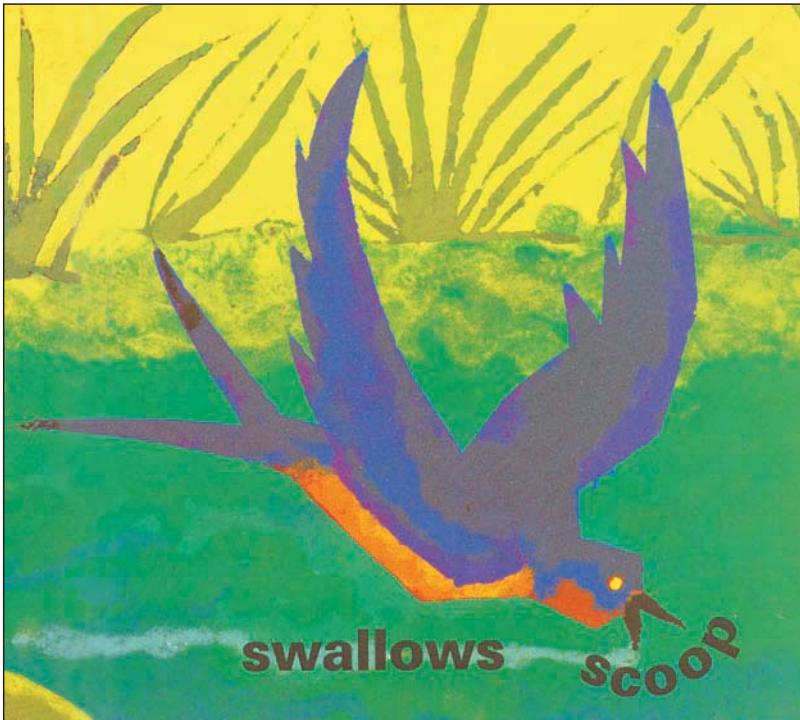
In this Caldecott Medal winner, David Wisniewski sculpts illustrations using intricately shaped papers, building dramatic scenes that illustrate the ancient legend of the Golem. In this picture, delicately cut plant life rises from the base of the image in front of the giant Golem. His jacket and pants are striped with thin cut slits that suggest folds and give depth to the garments. In the background, cut shapes are arranged to form the detailed architecture of Prague. Take time to examine which paper layer was put down first and which layer was put down last.

The original illustrations for this book are displayed in shadow boxes. Some of the paper shapes in the compositions are mounted on backings before being added to the scenes, giving them even more of a three-dimensional quality. In other places the papers are not glued completely flat and as a result cast a shadow, adding further dimension.



Hondo and Fabian. By Peter McCarty. 2002. 40p. Holt, \$16.95 (9780805063523); Square Fish, paper, \$6.95 (9780312367473).

This charming Caldecott Honor Book is soft and gentle both in words and pictures. Peter McCarty skillfully draws each illustration with pencil and watercolor, but we cannot see where the marks or brushstrokes begin, stop, or change. The edges of objects are soft and fuzzy. Smooth tones transition from lights to darks, and colors seem to appear within the soft shades of gray. In this illustration, Hondo the dog has a soft brown belly that transforms into cream and then white. Fabian the cat glows against the night sky. Tones separate and disappear, leaving white lines that surface and divide the composition.



***In the Small, Small Pond.* By Denise Fleming. 1993. 32p. Holt, \$17.95 (9780805022643); paper, \$7.95 (9780805059830). Also available in a big-book edition.**

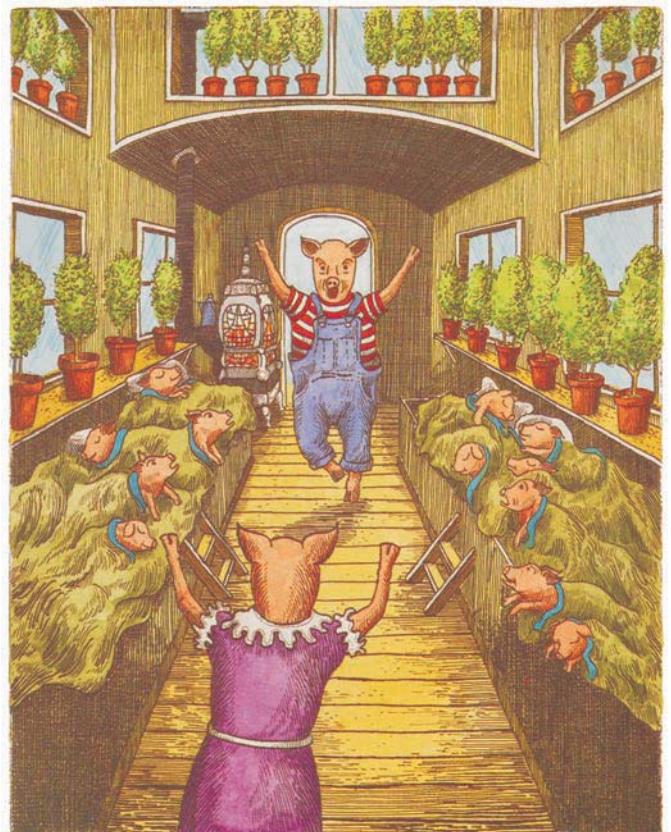
Denise Fleming developed her “pulp painting” papermaking technique more than 16 years ago. She works with cotton rag that is beaten to a pulp in a blender. The wet pulp is separated into different containers and colored with pigments and dyes. Instead of using brushes and pencils, Fleming fills squeeze bottles and cups with the colored pulps and pours the ingredients into hand-cut stencils arranged on a layer of wet pulp called the base sheet. Stencils control where the colors go, and wet pulp builds up, sometimes to over three-quarters of an inch thick. She then presses the illustrations dry between paper and newsprint. The pulp fibers interlock when the water is removed and join together to form the paper.

Look closely at the swooping swallow pictured here. Notice the shades of colors Fleming uses to create the wings and the belly. In the background, green water and yellow sky meet and mix to give the illusion of the bright sun reflecting on the water’s surface.

***Nursery Crimes.* By Arthur Geisert. 2001. 32p. Houghton/Walter Lorraine, \$16 (9780618064878); paper, \$6.95 (9780618956715).**

Arthur Geisert’s picture books feature elaborate copperplate etchings. The process of etching has not changed in 500 years and was utilized by the great Dutch artist Rembrandt, among others. For each illustration, Geisert uses a sharp needle to draw on a metal plate covered with a wax coating. The plate is then placed in acid, which eats away at the exposed metal, creating grooves. Ink is rubbed into these grooves, and the plate and paper are then run through a press to make a print. As a final step, Geisert hand-colors each print.

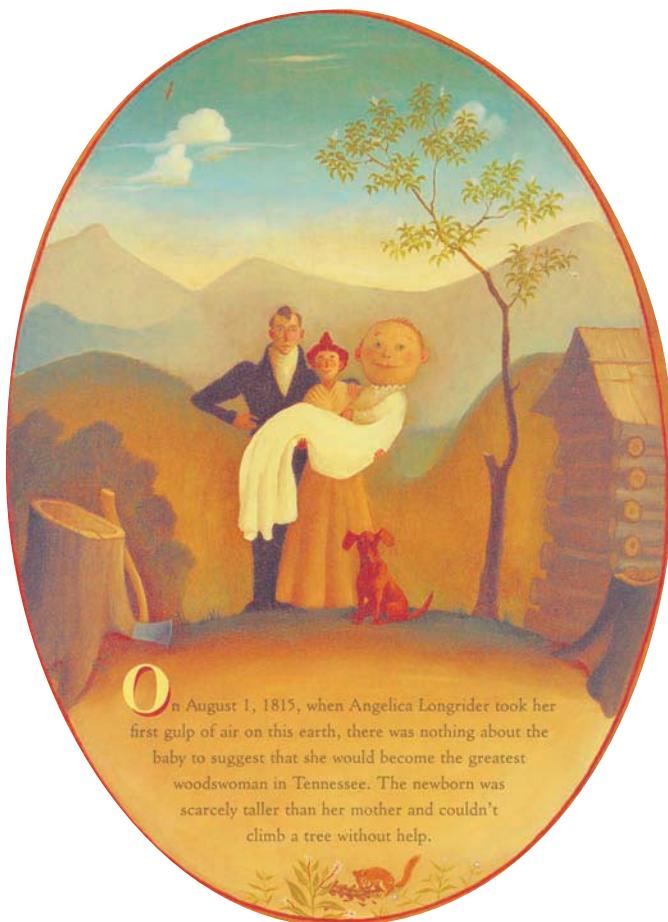
In this picture we see Jambo the father waking his family with the grim news of a topiary theft. The areas in black are the printed etched lines of the plate. Thin repeated lines drawn close together indicate the room’s shadows and folds in the blankets, while short, curly marks are used to portray the trees arranged along the sills. Colors applied by hand give this picture warmth.



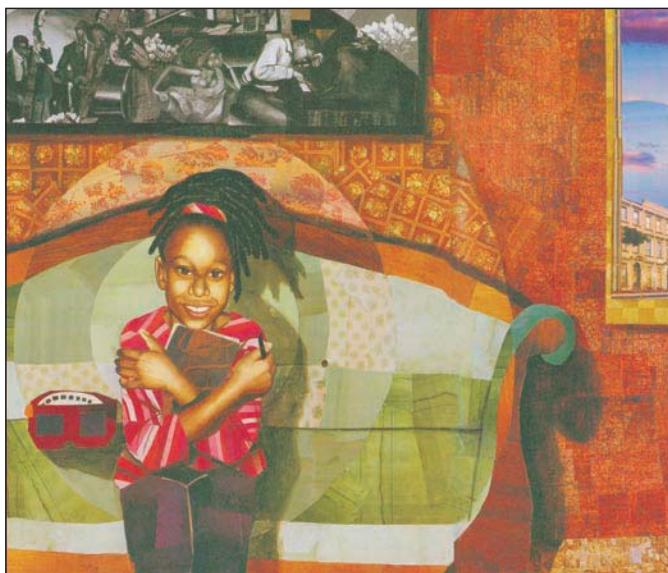
Swamp Angel. By Anne Isaacs. Illus. by Paul O. Zelinsky. 1994. 48p. Dutton, \$17.99 (9780525452713); Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780140559088).

In every book he illustrates, Paul O. Zelinsky chooses his style and media based on the individual story, so rarely are any two of his books alike. In *Swamp Angel*, each of the pictures is painted on cherry, maple, or birch wood veneer, an unusual support for book illustrations, but an appropriate choice for this tall tale, which is set in the woods of Tennessee. Another choice not typical of book illustrators is Zelinsky's use of slow-drying oil paints, which allows him to build up dense areas of color and depth. The original illustrations of this Caldecott Honor Book are about twice the size of the printed page.

In this portrait, the giant baby Angelica poses with her parents and dog outside the family home. An axe leaning against a stump foretells of the heroine's destiny. Mountains in the distance set the stage, and details such as the tiny squirrel chewing a pine cone accentuate the large and small scale.



On August 1, 1815, when Angelica Longrider took her first gulp of air on this earth, there was nothing about the baby to suggest that she would become the greatest woodswoman in Tennessee. The newborn was scarcely taller than her mother and couldn't climb a tree without help.



Visiting Langston. By Willie Perdomo. Illus. by Bryan Collier. 2002. 32p. Holt, \$16.95 (9780805067446); paper, \$6.95 (9780805078817).

Utilizing a very different style of cut-paper art as compared with David Wisniewski (see above), Bryan Collier combines hand-painted details with cut papers, resulting in rich, dense collages. Look closely at the pictures in this Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Book to see how layers of patterns and shapes are arranged to create people and places. Cut-outs of found objects from magazines add detail to the scenes. Collier arranges the pieces with care as he hangs the wallpaper, arranges tiles on a floor, and designs clothing for the characters.

In this illustration, a smiling young poet clutches her notebook as she awaits a visit to the home of writer Langston Hughes. Her pink blouse is created from a series of striped pattern pieces. The sofa cushions are papers of assorted green fabrics that are pieced together to resemble a quilted spread. Cut papers form subtle circle shapes that radiate up from the young girl into the wallpaper and end in the black-and-white painting above the couch. [🔗](#)

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