

Make Your Child a Hero

Artwork

I was very fortunate with the first two handmade family children's books to have a talented young artist friend, Grace Linderholm, who was in the ninth grade at the time she illustrated the first homemade/handmade book, *Eli's Mouse*. She was a senior in high school when she made the first illustrations for *Langston's Moon*, and used some of those images in her college applications art portfolio. I imagined the stories and she imagined the pictures. I put together simple layouts for the stories and had them bound at local office supply stores.

Grace has since grown up and moved on to graduate (with honors) in Art from NYU and is now an artist with her own studio in Brooklyn, New York. She expanded on her original *Langston's Moon* illustrations to create our published version of that story. Now, though, I am in the process of trying to figure out how to include my own artwork in my next commercial children's story.

The suggestions below are options for you and me to explore in imagining our stories:

- 1) If your book is a mini-memoir (or a fantasy) and you have family photos you can use as your graphics, use them and strategically supplement with free stock art from online sources like **stockfreeimages.com** where you can download photos, cartoon art, abstract design—in short, all kinds of stuff, to enhance your book. For example, at the stockfreeimages.com site, I searched “cats.” They have sixty-five PAGES of cats: photos, fine art, and cartoon images. There are two pages of “county fair” images and 870 PAGES of sunsets. I did searches on “vintage Dodge cars,” “Washington D.C. neighborhoods,” “bicycles,” and other specific searches and found a variety of images. Another source, graphics that you can access directly through **Microsoft Word's Ribbon “Insert”** option are all free with no worries for you about copyright infringement.
- 2) if your child is too young to have been brainwashed into believing that he or she has to stay within the lines to color properly or has not been told yet that he or she just can't cut it as an artist collaborate with your child as your illustrator.
- 3) Try a combination method with background photos and collage cut-out cartoon characters. (Mo Willems did this with his delightful *Snuffle Bunny*.)
- 4) Trace from stock images or other source material using a device such as a Micron pen permanent ink “Brush,” or a fine point permanent ink Sharpie. Color wash with transparent or semi-transparent watercolors, colored pencils, or colored felt tip pens like Prismacolor art markers. (Betsy Lewin used the tracing/watercolor technique in the funny and clever story, *Click, Clack, Moo. Cows That Type*.)
- 5) Draw pen and ink stick figures for your graphics and wash the backgrounds with some color.
- 6) Don't do it yourself. Approach a middle school or high school art teacher with your project and ask if he or she could recommend a student to produce your art at a price you can afford.

- 7) Build your artistic confidence through researching and doing practice exercises from books like *Drawing with Children, A Creative Teaching and Learning Method That Works for Adults, Too*, by Mona Brookes, Saint Martin's Press, New York, or *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Dr. Betty Edwards.
- 8) Check out cartooning books for step-by-step methods to raw cartoons that resemble the animals or people you want to represent. These books are usually produced for kids with perfect instructions for anyone who wants to learn cartooning skills. Subjects range from step-by-step illustrations to help one draw everyday objects like people, cats, and cars to creating dragons and other mythical creatures.

What to Do Next: Produce The Book.