

Iza Trapani's Tips for Aspiring Illustrators:

1) Read! - Read lots of picture books and pay special attention to the illustrations. Examine how the words and pictures work together.

2) Plan- Do rough, thumbnail sketches laying out the words and pictures on a storyboard (a blueprint for the book where all the pages are drawn on one large sheet of paper). Then do a more detailed dummy (a full-size mock-up of the book with pencil sketches). This is all described in detail in Uri Shulevitz's book listed at the bottom of this page.

3) Communicate- The purpose of pictures is to clarify and enhance the text. Be clear about what you are saying with your pictures. Stay focused and don't add more than the text calls for.

4) Composition- Have a variety of single and double page spreads and spots (vignettes). Follow distant scenes with close-ups, quiet scenes with lively ones and vice-versa. Vary perspectives. Keep in mind that the text is part of the overall design and also make sure there is enough room for it. Maintain a good composition despite the problematic gutter (where the pages join in the center). Make sure you don't put anything too important near it. Each page relates to the others so consider the book as a whole. The storyboard is where you work this all out.

5) Characters- The story will suggest the characters, whether they be people or animals and if animals, whether they should be natural or anthropomorphized (with human characteristics, wearing clothes). If you do choose to humanize the animals make sure it's an appropriate choice. In a story with wild or farm animals you would probably not want to dress them, but if the characters are to represent children then, of course, put them in outfits.

6) Perspective- Dramatic perspective and foreshortening can be visually exciting but use them appropriately- when the scene calls for it.

7) Consistency- Make sure your characters and scenery are consistent from page to page. Maintain a likeness in the characters as they appear in the different scenes. Plenty of preliminary sketching of the characters in various poses will help with that. Also pay attention to the scenery as viewpoints change. If a front view of a house shows a tree on its right, a back view would show the tree on the left. This is a very simple example. In complicated scenes it can be tricky.

8) Details- Details enrich the illustrations but too many can be distracting. Use them wisely, keeping the focus on the main action and character(s) in the scenes.

9) Foreshadowing- This adds to the continuity of a book. An example might be a mouse hole as a clue that a mouse will be appearing on a following page. It's also a good way to set the stage for the book when used on the title, copyright and dedication pages.

10) Style- The style and media are your choice, but remember that your main purpose is to communicate the story and to engage the reader. Have fun and good luck!

Some suggested reading (in addition to lots of picture books):

Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books by Uri Shulevitz

Bookmaking: Editing, Design, Production, Third Edition by Marshall Lee

Children's Book Illustration: Step by Step Techniques: A Unique Guide from the Masters by Jill Bossert