

**2026
Hans Christian
Andersen Award**



**JOSÉE
BISAILLON**

Illustrator Nominee | Canada

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INTRODUCTION

JOSÉE BISAILLON

IBBY Canada is delighted to submit the candidacy of illustrator **Josée Bisailon** to represent Canada at the 2026 edition of the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

As a young girl, Josée Bisailon loved drawing cats and houses. She enjoyed school and always returned home full of stories to tell. She pursued her education all the way to university, where she fell in love with illustration. Since then, scissors and brushes in hand, Josée has illustrated more than 50 picture books, including the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award-winning *The Snow Knows*.

Josée's work stands out both in Canada and abroad. It has been recognized and awarded several times. She is a four-time finalist for Canada's Governor General's Literary Award. In addition to her work in children's illustration, Josée regularly contributes to several magazines and newspapers in Canada, the United States and Asia. She also hosts presentations and workshops in schools and libraries to share her passion for illustration and literature. Many of Josée's books are filled with cultural and social issues and feature endearing children from different backgrounds.

Josée Bisailon is an astonishing artist, and her impressive body of work makes her the ideal candidate to represent IBBY Canada for the 2026 edition of the Hans Christian Andersen Award.



ABOUT





ABOUT

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

January 2025

I had Josée Bisailon as a student many years ago, in the early 2000s. I remember very well her already fervent passion for illustration and her desire to create images that would be very personal to her. She admired the magnificent work of fellow artist Wolf Erlbruch, whose art was a catalyst for Josée pursuing a career in illustration.

During an illustration internship, while Josée was working on a version of *Alice in Wonderland*, I had pushed her to do in-depth research to find *her* version of the character, to distance herself as much as possible from all the other versions that already existed. After many attempts, she came up with an absolutely marvellous sketch of an exquisite Alice who, moreover, had a family resemblance to her creator. It was at that moment that I was convinced she would become a great artist. I don't think I expected it to happen so quickly and in such an exemplary way! Not only does Josée Bisailon create wonderful illustrations for many books, but she does it at a truly astonishing pace. It seems to me that every time I turn my head in her direction, she already has a new book in bookstores and another one in the process. All this while raising three children. I must admit that I don't understand how she does it and in such a graceful way. Watching her create is an exercise in humility and curiosity. It does not surprise me that she has accumulated so many accolades and awards.

And I must say that it is very, very well deserved.

Pol Turgeon



Teacher, illustrator, visual artist
514-827-8328 | pol@polturgeon.com





ABOUT BIOGRAPHY



JOSÉE BISAILLON

Originally from St-Hyacinthe, Quebec, author-illustrator Josée Bisailon is a four-time finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Children's Literature.

After completing college studies in design, she continued her education at the Université du Québec à Montréal in graphic design. Since 2005, she has illustrated over 50 children's books, and her work has been recognized and awarded both nationally and internationally.

Her style is distinguished by the use of mixed-media techniques that incorporate a variety of materials, including collage, drawing, pastel, gouache, and digital assembly. Her images are recognizable for their soft tones interspersed with bursts of colour, evoking emotion. In 2018, she made her writing debut with her picture book, *Reviens sur terre Esther! (Come Back to Earth, Esther!)*. In addition to her work in children's literature, Josée collaborates with several magazines and newspapers. She also gives lectures and workshops for both adults and children, sharing her passion for illustration and literature.



Photo credit: Julie Artacho

WORK



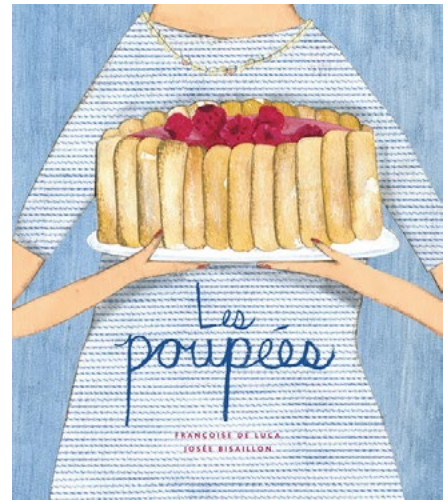
FIVE MOST SIGNIFICANT TITLES



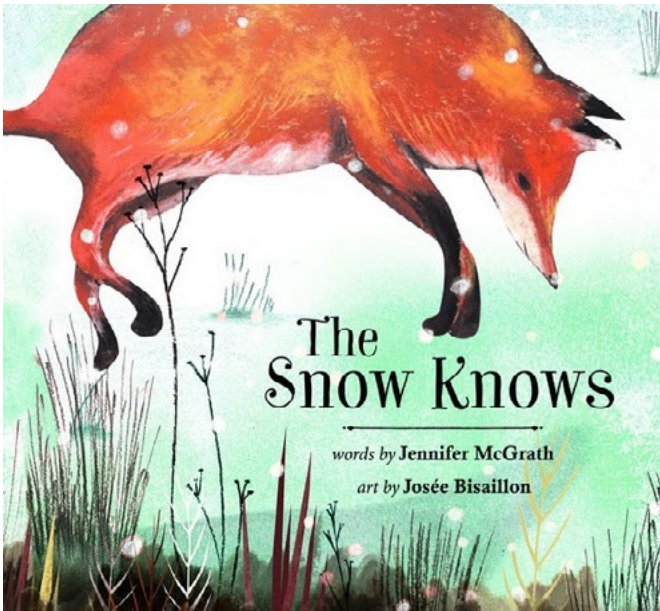
D'eux, 2024



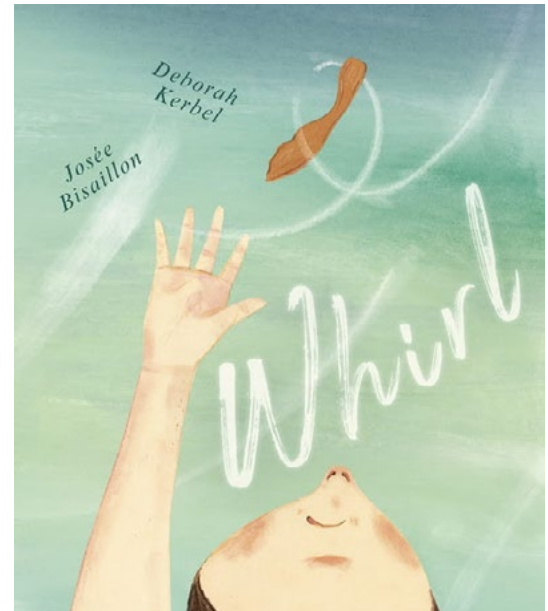
La courte échelle, 2018



Marchand de feuilles, 2017



Nimbus Publishing, 2016



Owlkids Books, 2022

LE CHANT DE LA GRIVE

The Thrush Song

Written by Martine Arpin
Illustrated by Josée Bisaillon
Sherbrooke: D'eux, 2024

REVIEWS

★ *Le Devoir* (Yannick Marcoux)*

In Martine Arpin's brand-new book, *Le chant de la grive*, the young protagonist goes about his little life, unconcerned by the fact that his small talents—like “perfectly imitating the song of the thrush”—interest no one. The real problem, though, is that everything he does, says, or even doesn't do or say, attracts the attention of the big Jules. This peacock, both bully and scoffer, has taken a dislike to the narrator, “hovering above his head like a bird of prey.” The character has tried everything to get rid of him, in vain, until one day, solidarity finally reveals itself, “as luminous as the constellations in the August sky.”

We recognize all too well this situation we wish didn't exist in our world, woven here with restraint and just the right dose of emotion. A poignant demonstration of the arbitrary violence of bullying, which gives way to the powerful song of unity. With playful and iridescent strokes, Josée Bisaillon creates a multitude of portraits and shapes a human army from which an inspiring and liberating force emerges.

★ *Le Monde**

The issue of bullying is often addressed in a clumsy or heavy-handed way, but not here. We follow the days of a schoolboy overshadowed by the hurtful remarks of the “big Jules.” Each character is nuanced: on one side, the mistreated narrator, who knows the names of all the constellations and can imitate bird songs but doesn't excel in class or gym. And on the other, the bully, who, behind his big mouth, reveals a certain unease. A story that isn't black and white—it's refreshing.

*This text was translated from French to English by IBBY Canada's team.



LE PELLETEUR DE NUAGES

The Cloud Shoveler

Written by Simon Boulerice
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon

Montreal: La courte échelle, 2018

REVIEWS

★ Tire lire à livres*

I present to you the sublime work *Le pelleteur de nuages* by author Simon Boulerice and illustrator Josée Bisailon—published by Éditions La courte échelle. Poetry and imagination meet here to stir the heart. Immersed in a world filled with softness, the dreamy reader will feel an irresistible urge to be carried away by this story. From page to page, I was struck by the beauty of the illustrations. They are magnificent!

The theme of difference colours the story. It is the central thread of the main character's thoughts. Elliot feels deep discomfort about his vitiligo. Throughout the book, several passages highlight his unease and worries. His parents try to reassure him, but to no avail. Kudos to the author for portraying parents engaging in activities that challenge stereotypes—a father gardening and a mother fixing cars.

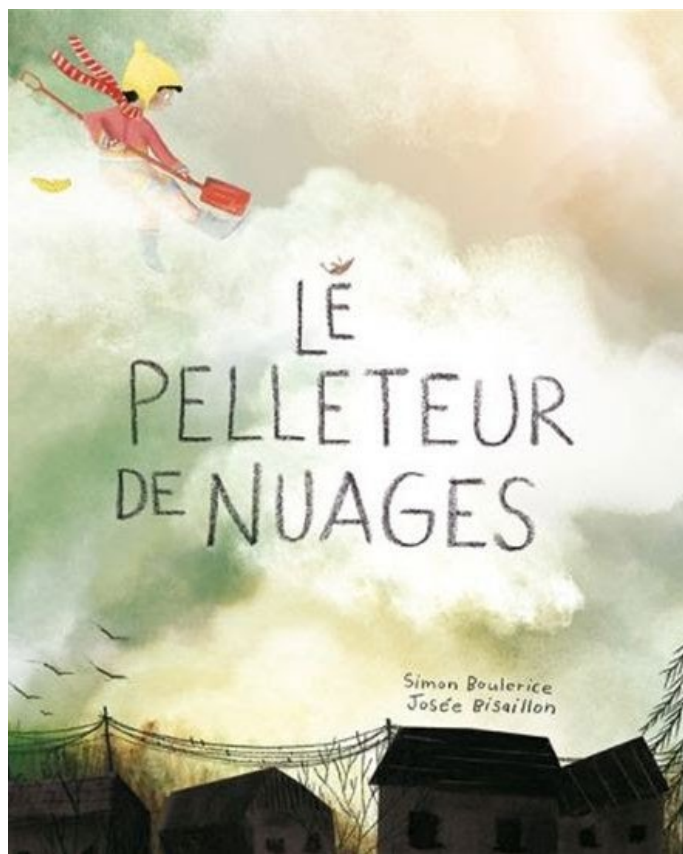
The endearing character of Elliot is passionate about clouds. He takes great pleasure in sharing tender moments with his father, observing and describing them. "When Elliot pretends to be a poet, his father nicknames him the cloud shoveler." The young boy also loves snow. "To him, it's like clouds unraveling into cotton confetti." On the one hand, this interest brings him joy, but it also hides a deeper wish: "He especially can't wait to put on his big mittens to hide his hands, which keep losing their colour."

At several points, the author draws parallels with the boy's passion. For example, when Elliot enjoys his favourite treat, cotton candy, the strands of sugar floating away evoke clouds. A similar link can be made with his hands, but I won't spoil the ending for you.

This sensitive work truly touches the heart. It made me think of my children and the students I've taught over the years. We see young Elliot comparing himself to others and facing the questions of his classmates. You can't help but feel empathetic as he feels shame about his vitiligo. Readers will easily identify with the young boy—after all, who hasn't felt self-conscious at some point?

In a society that often tries to fit us into the same mould, it's refreshing to celebrate each person's uniqueness. This story carries a touching message. Its themes of self-acceptance and valuing differences invite reflection on societal standards and the harsh gaze we sometimes turn on ourselves. The book also reminds us—both children and adults—of the importance of opening up to others and embracing our differences.

I'll never look at clouds the same way again. This endearing character left a lasting impression on me. The author's message is both powerful and tender: "You who hid your hands, you who should never feel ashamed of them—this book is for you."



*This text was translated from French to English by IBBY Canada's team.

★ Mistikrak!*

Elliot loves clouds, but he hates the white spots that have appeared on his hands and grow a little more every day. At school, his classmates, intrigued, start asking questions. — “Why are you changing colour? Are you going to turn completely white like Michael Jackson?” Elliot feels ashamed of his fading hands, but he’s also worried: “How far will this go? If all my colour disappears, will I disappear too?” he wonders. Thanks to his boundless imagination, the boy his father affectionately calls “the cloud shoveler” (*Le pelleteur de nuages*) will finally find meaning and beauty in this difference.

This story moved me deeply. Elliot is a boy who is sensitive to the beauty of the world, nature, and especially clouds. He shares a beautiful bond with his father, with whom he observes the sky and walks to the local candy store to enjoy cotton candy. His father loves gardening, while Elliot’s mother repairs cars. But Elliot worries: his skin is losing its colour. It starts with white spots on his fingers, then spreads to his wrists. If all his colour disappears, will he disappear too?

In spring, summer, and fall, on sunny days, Elliot and his father lie on their backs in the grass. They point a finger toward the clouds. His father’s finger is chocolate brown, with soil under the nail. Elliot’s finger is almost the same colour, but here and there, the milk chocolate of his skin is spotted with drops of white chocolate. (p.4)

Josée Bisailon’s soft illustrations perfectly complement the text. Once again, Simon Boulerice does not disappoint. In the afterword, he writes with finesse: “Those who [live with vitiligo] sometimes feel ashamed of their spots. They shouldn’t, because it’s often our little imperfections that make us unique.” *Le pelleteur de nuages* is a children’s book that will also resonate with adults. It is a story filled with grace and poetry.

★ Moi parent*

“ARE YOU GOING TO TURN COMPLETELY WHITE LIKE MICHAEL JACKSON?”

Differences can often be unsettling for many children who experience them daily—not to mention the reactions of their peers. In *Le pelleteur de nuages*, Elliot has vitiligo, a visible difference.

This is a wonderful story, tender and whimsical, where we follow the journey of this little boy as he learns to embrace the shades of his skin.

Touching! Through the eyes of a child, the author beautifully demonstrates how imagination is a source of wealth and a springboard to happiness. It shows that every difference has its place—when we choose to make room for it.

★ Pause lecture (Mylène)*

Simon Boulerice, always interested in the theme of differences, was inspired when he met a boy in a classroom who had vitiligo. He wrote this story to show him that he should never be ashamed of his skin that is losing its colour.

Elliot loves all clouds, and when he talks about them, it’s like listening to a poet. His father calls him the cloud shoveler. His father is Black, his mother is white, but Elliot feels embarrassed about the spots on his hands. He doesn’t understand why they are there. Elliot also loves winter because he can wear mittens to hide his hands. He often feels sad, pulling down his sleeves to cover them.

One day, during a charcoal drawing workshop, he finds a moment of happiness because all the students now have black marks on their hands. But it’s through his imagination that he learns to embrace his condition: he’s a cloud shoveler, and that’s why he has white spots on his hands!

This picture book about self-esteem is beautiful and conveys an important message: we should never be ashamed of our differences. Josée Bisailon gave the illustrations a soft, cloud-like texture that wonderfully complements Simon Boulerice’s text.

*This text was translated from French to English by IBBY Canada’s team.

LES POUPÉES

The Dolls

Written by Françoise De Luca

Illustrated by Josée Bisaillon

Montreal: Marchand de feuilles, 2017

REVIEW

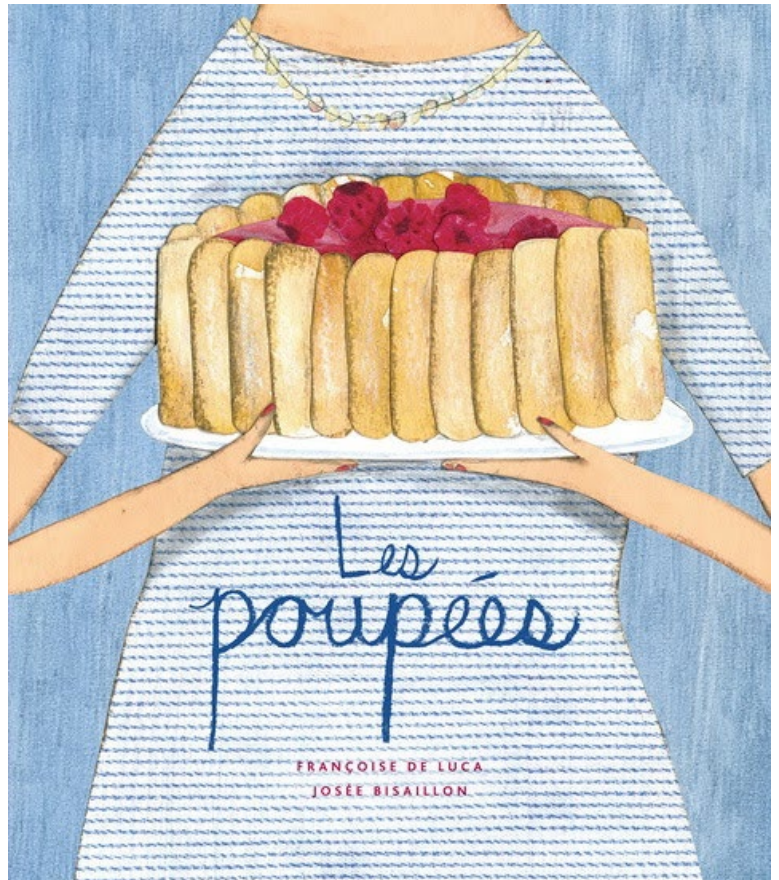
★ Les libraires*

When she grows up, Lucie will travel. She will dance to the sound of the tam-tam. She will be free. She might even teach children to read or care for the sick—who knows? One thing is certain: she will not be like the adults she knows, those predictable people who try to fit children into moulds. If she tells them she doesn't like pink or dresses, they pretend not to hear her and keep giving her dolls she doesn't know what to do with.

Lucie also dreams of having a brother to play with, someone who would listen to her. She finds it hard to live alone with her mother. One

day, her mother tells her a story. It is the story of Kalina, a little girl surrounded by five brothers who only want to play warriors. But Kalina would rather play with dolls. Since her family is too poor to buy her one, she decides to take matters into her own hands. She starts collecting bits of vine, corn leaves, and straw stems, and eventually manages to craft, with her own hands, a doll—imperfect, but one that makes her feel less alone.

Hearing this, Lucie has a brilliant idea: what if she sent her dolls to Kalina's country?



*This text was translated from French to English by IBBY Canada's team.

THE SNOW KNOWS

Written by Jennifer McGrath
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2016

REVIEWS

★ **Canadian Review of Materials, Volume XXIII Number 8 October 28, 2016**

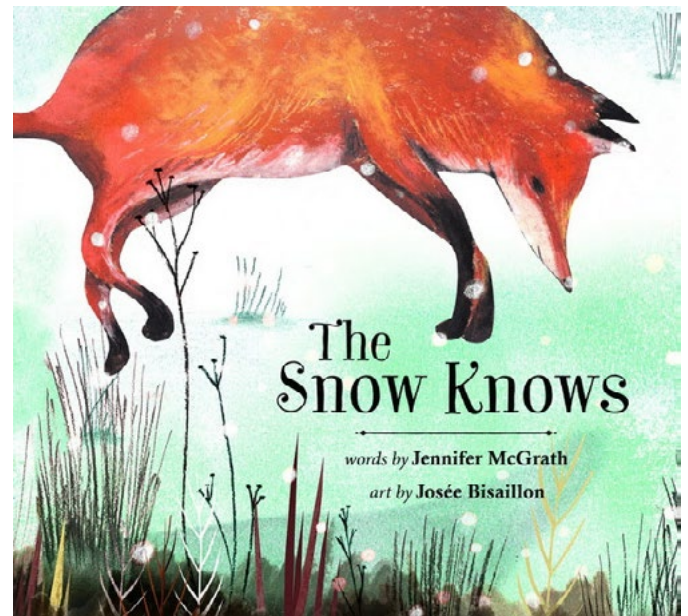
Imagine looking out the window of a rural home on a winter's day. All may seem still and quiet, but on closer inspection the outdoors is alive with woodland creatures that leave their imprints on the snow. Those marks tell stories, and this picture book captures the trails and tales in simple language and engaging illustrations to delight youngsters.

Short phrases easily conjure action images with verb choices: sleeps, bounds, run, trots, hides, slides, slinks, choir, and rich figurative language. There's alliteration (coyotes choir), consonance (lynx slinks), assonance (snow knows, goes), rhyme (partridge hides, otter slides), onomatopoeia (hush-shush, pitter-skitter), metaphor (coyotes choir). Read aloud, the prose poem draws the reader into its calming rhythm, easy to remember sounds and sensory detail. This effect is broken once, with the expression "porcupine ponders," a slightly tougher word choice for kids and the only abstract concept. The domestic cat and child brought in at the end bring satisfying engagement and inclusion.

Illustrations done in paper collage and soft colour (pencils?) lead the reader on to the next page with a cleverly placed animated critter or movement toward the right side. Depth is created with a layered effect. There's drama with the positioning of snowy owl wings fanned out across the double page spread, excitement with the narrow escape of mice from a predatory owl, humour with the fox's leap and otter's play, and mystery with the cautious lynx and howling coyote choir.

Young readers will enjoy return visits to this quiet book with its invitation to imagine the lives and activities of outdoor creatures in winter. Perhaps a good bedtime story, it will leave them with a sense of wonder about the natural world.

Highly Recommended.





★ **Canadian Children’s Book News, Fall 2017, Vol. 40 No. 3 (Aiki Tryphonopoulos)**

The Snow Knows reveals what Robert Frost might have seen had he entered those lovely, dark and deep woods on that snowy evening: the busy, mysterious and often dramatic lives of the forest animals. These lives are known to the snow, which floats over everything, blankets the forest floor and keeps ephemeral records of the lives that pass through it. In McGrath and Bisailon’s book, what the snow knows becomes known by a child (and us as readers) who ventures outside to discover what is normally hidden to the human eye.

McGrath’s text is a lulling chant, a seemingly simple poem with wordplay that includes onomatopoeia; end, slant and internal rhymes and alliteration. “The snow knows” repeats throughout, creating a pattern that is matched and extended by Bisailon’s pastel, pencil and cut-paper illustrations. Bisailon’s art makes a circular story, where we begin and end with the human world and, in between, are pulled along, left to right, by her dynamic depictions of animals scampering, trotting and cavorting in the snow.

She adds a search-and-find element where each animal mentioned in the text can be spotted in the background of the previous page. Both author and illustrator pull their weight to create a playful, dreamy, calming story.

The Snow Knows makes a fine bedtime read for four- to eight-year-olds, can be used to introduce North American wildlife to little ones and encourages curiosity about the majestic, mysterious outdoors.

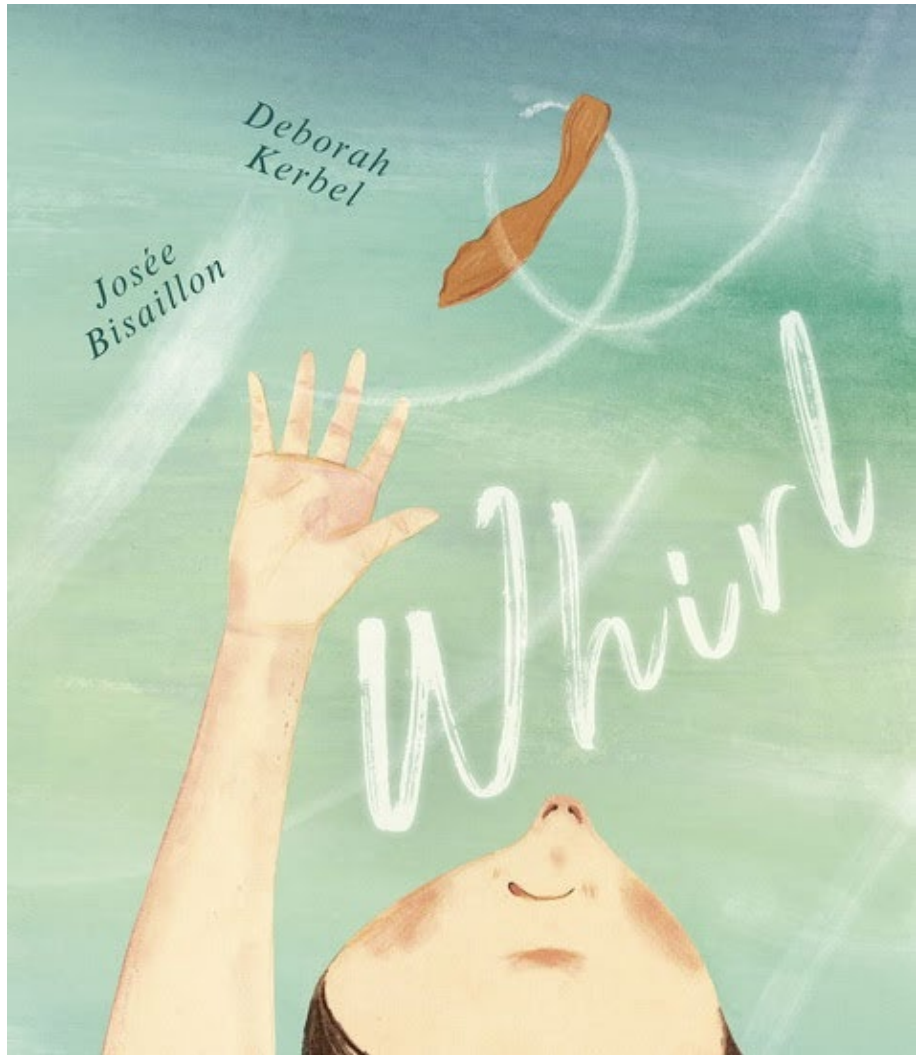
WHIRL

Storyline by Deborah Kerbel
Illustrated by Josée Bisaillon
Toronto: Owlkids Books, 2022

REVIEWS

★ Canadian Review of Materials, Volume XXIX / Issue 3 - September 16/2022

Whirl is a wordless picture book that follows the journey of a maple seed as it floats and spins through the air and down to the ground. The story by Deborah Kerbel and illustrations by Josée Bisaillon celebrates the simple everyday joys that both humans and animals experience while living in and near nature. The vibrant picture book follows the maple seed as it floats over and into everyday activities. The seed is utilized throughout the story by both children and animals in a variety of scenes. Young children will enjoy piecing together the maple seed's journey and purpose on each illustrated page.



The maple seed's journey begins on the title page of the book which shows the seed leaving the maple tree's branches to spin through the air. The spinning seed floats over many activities, including gardening, dog walking, cycling, skateboarding, and hiking. The only words in the book can be found on the last page, a page full of fascinating maple seed facts. Young readers will enjoy learning many interesting facts, including that only dry maple seeds can take flight singly and not in green pairs. Through the book's pages, the maple seed is used in children's creative play as well as in their art. When birds and animals get a hold of the maple seed, readers will see how the seed travels from place to place, eventually becoming a new maple tree.

Whirl is an enjoyable story full of joy and wonder that both children and adults will be able to relate to. The detailed illustrations of the natural world on each page will provide many opportunities for discussion. Readers will be able to make connections and discuss our relationship to nature and its role in everyday life. Young readers, who can not yet read, will also be able to enjoy the book on their own. The wondrous journey taken by the maple seed in *Whirl* evokes a sense of peace and tranquility. The story also summons a sense of hope as the seed touches the lives of humans, birds, and animals to then grow from the earth's soil as a new tree.

Highly Recommended

★ **School Library Journal, May 1, 2022**

PreS-Gr 3–A wordless title that celebrates the samara, the seed of a maple tree. The back matter informs readers that the design of the seed’s wing is not just for the delight of children who love to see them fly so perfectly in the air, but that they are in fact aerodynamic wonders of nature. A single maple seed’s journey from falling off a tree one year to sapling the next invites readers to follow the seed as it interacts with a diverse cast of human and animal characters. The multi-paneled illustrations are varied and include broad views and tight close-ups encouraging readers to scrutinize each step and marvel at the seed’s gift for spinning through the world.

VERDICT: Perfect for encouraging engagement, and appreciation, for the wonders of the natural world; if there are maple trees nearby all the better to inspire a hands-on connection that will send readers whirling outdoors.

★ **Canadian Children’s Books News, Summer 2022, Vol. 45 No. 2 (Ken Kilback)**

One day, the wind snaps a samara (whirligig or helicopter) off a maple tree. The whirligig passes over a family’s backyard, where a young girl fails to catch it, and eventually lands in a park. Two children find the samara and play with it, pretending it’s a mustache or earring before putting it back down. The first young girl appears now with her grandparent, picking up the whirligig as she collects naturally found objects for her artistic creations. She later puts the samara back outside, and a bird flies off with it. But when the whirligig falls to the ground, a dog unknowingly helps push it into the dirt. And the germination process begins.

Deborah Kerbel’s wordless story is a beautiful and quiet reflection on life cycles, connecting the samara’s journey to the human experience. In the beginning, we see a pregnant woman in the backyard. Later, while the young girl is creating art with natural objects, the pregnant woman heads off to give birth. After some time has passed, the woman’s family is out for a walk in the woods, the baby all bundled up with them. Soon they come across the once-samara, now a young maple sapling. Josée Bisailon’s mixed-media illustrations are wonderful, soft in colour to reflect the gentle tone of the story, yet full of the movement of breezes that carry us along from beginning to end.





WORK

TEN MOST IMPORTANT TITLES



LE CHANT DE LA GRIVE

The Thrush Song

Written by Martine Arpin
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Sherbrooke: D'eux, 2024



LE PELLETEUR DE NUAGES

The Cloud Shoveler

Written by Simon Boulerice
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Montreal: La courte échelle, 2018



DANCING WITH DAISY

Written by Jan L. Coates
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Tors Cove: Running the Goat Books, 2019



LES POUPÉES

The Dolls

Written by Françoise De Luca
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Montreal: Marchand de feuilles, 2017



LEAP!

Written by JonArno Lawson
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Toronto: Kids Can Press, 2027



THE SNOW KNOWS

Written by Jennifer McGrath
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2016



MA TÊTE EN L'AIR

My Head in the Clouds

Written by Danielle Chaperon
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Montreal: Fonfon, 2017



SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A RIVER

Written by Danielle Daniel
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2023



MILO AND GEORGIE

Written by Bree Galbraith
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Toronto: Owlkids Books, 2017



WHIRL

Storyline by Deborah Kerbel
Illustrated by Josée Bisailon
Toronto: Owlkids Books, 2022





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Aujourd'hui, promis!, Fonfon (text and illustrations), Canada, release scheduled for fall 2025

Rewriting the Rules: How Dr. Kathleen Friel Created New Possibilities for Brain Research and Disability, Lerner Publishing, Danna Zeiger, USA, release scheduled for fall 2025

Wind Is a Dance, Kids Can Press, Debra Kempf Shumaker, Canada, 2024

Le chant de la grive, D'eux, Martine Arpin, Canada, 2024

I Think I Think a Lot, Free Spirit Publishing, Jessica Whipple, USA, 2023

Sometimes I Feel Like a River, Groundwood Books, Danielle Daniel, Canada, 2023

The Animals Come Out, Groundwood Books, Susan Vande Griek, Canada, 2023

Henrigolo, Fonfon, Émilie Perreault, Canada, 2023

I Want to Build a Seahouse, Nimbus Publishing, Whitney Moran, Canada, 2023

Les quatre saisons du Pipa, La montagne secrète, Patrick Lacoursière, Canada, 2022 (Also available in English: *The Four Seasons of the Pipa*, The Secret Mountain, Canada, 2022)

Whirl, Owlkids Books, Deborah Kerbel, Canada, 2022

Martin and the River, Groundwood Books, Jon-Erik Lappano, Canada, 2022

Dans ma cuisine : Recettes et histoires pour la famille, Fonfon (text and illustrations), Canada, 2021

Poem in My Pocket, Kids Can Press, Chris Tougas, Canada, 2021

Out Into the Big Wide Lake, Tundra Books, Paul Harbridge, Canada, 2021

A Great Big Night, Nimbus Publishing, Kate Inglis, Canada, 2020

The Sun is a Peach, Orca Book Publishers, Sara Cassidy, Canada, 2020 (Also available in French: *Le soleil est une pêche*, Orca Book Publishers, 2020)

The Boreal Forest: A Year in the World's Largest Land Biome, Kids Can Press, L.E. Carmichael, Canada, 2020

Usha and the Stolen Sun, Owlkids Books, Bree Galbraith, Canada, 2020

The Moon is a Silver Pond, Orca Book Publishers, Sara Cassidy, Canada, 2019 (Also available in French: *La lune est un étang d'argent*, Orca Book Publishers, 2020)

Dancing With Daisy, Running the Goat Books & BroadSides, Jan L. Coates, Canada, 2019

Le pelleteur de nuages, La courte échelle, Simon Boulterice, Canada, 2018



Reviens sur terre Esther !, St-Jean Éditeur, (text and illustrations), Canada, 2018 (Also available in English: *Come Back to Earth, Esther!*, Nimbus Publishing, 2019)

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Little Stars, Korea Child Academy, South Korea, 2012

Un automne à cache-cache, Éditions Imagine, Mireille Levert, Canada, 2012

Un été dans le vent, Éditions Imagine, Mireille Levert, Canada, 2012

J'ai un bouton sur le bout de la langue, La montagne secrète, Canada, 2011

Un hiver en pyjama, Éditions Imagine, Mireille Levert, Canada, 2011

Oh No, School!, Eenart, Hae Kyung, South Korea, 2011 (Also available in the USA: *Magination Press*, 2014)

The Great Moon Hoax, Carolrhoda Books, Stephen Krensky, USA, 2011

Mon meilleur meilleur ami, Éditions Planète rebelle, Jennifer Couëlle, Canada, 2011,

Bookspeak! Poems About Books, Clarion Books, Laura Purdie Salas, USA, 2011

Un printemps à la pêche, Éditions Imagine, Mireille Levert, Canada, 2011

Le funambule : Un conte sur Marc Chagall, Les 400 coups, Marie-Danielle Croteau, Canada, 2010

Benno and the Night of Broken Glass, Kar-Ben Publishing, Meg Wiviott, USA, 2010

Mon papi, Les 400 coups, David Bouchard, Canada, 2009

I Can't Sleep, Yeowon Media, Cecil Kim, South Korea, 2009 (Also available in the United Kingdom: *Big and Small*, 2015)

Le vrai de vrai journal de ma vie, Éditions Imagine, Gilles Tibo, Canada, 2008

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SPOTLIGHT





SPOTLIGHT

INTERNATIONAL REACH: Travels to Japan



Sponsored by the Délégation générale du Québec à Tokyo, during the 2023 Francophonie, Josée travelled to Japan and South Korea to participate in Francophonie festivities and other events to share Quebec's francophone culture. In Japan, events were organized for Josée at the Institut Franco-Japonais in Tokyo. In Kyoto, events were held at the Embassy of Canada, and the Itabashi City Library.

After Josée return to Canada, the panels created during her visit were exhibited in Tohoku in northern Japan in collaboration with Iwate Art Project. Josée's panels are still displayed at the Iwate Children's Forest.

Photo credit: Délégation générale du Québec à Tokyo





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INTERVIEW WITH JOSÉE BISAILLON

Let's Talk Illustrators #87: Josée Bisailon

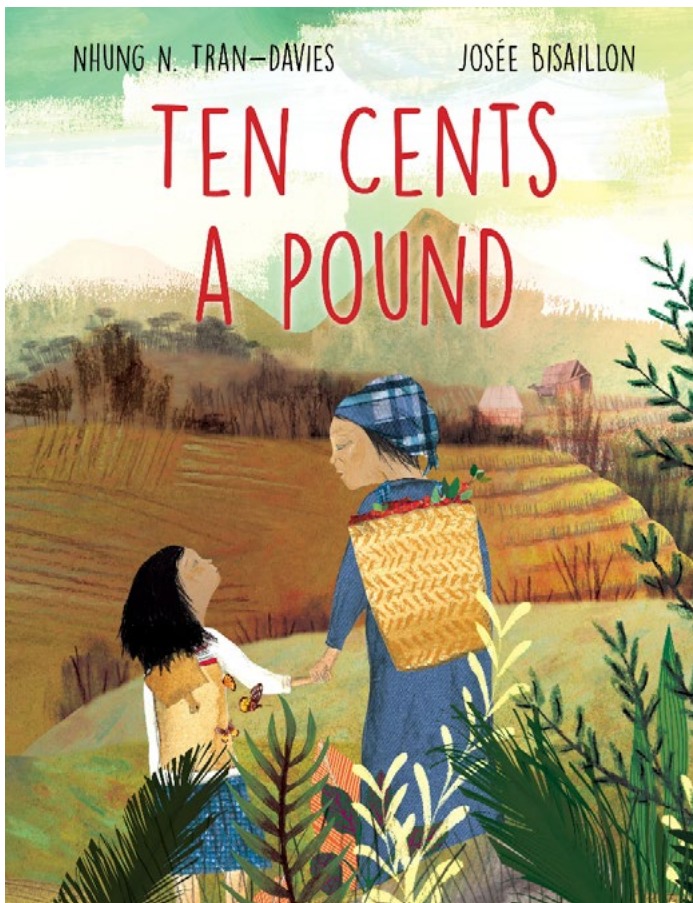
October 23, 2018 [\[link to the article\]](#)

Ten Cents a Pound by Nhung N. Tran-Davies and Josée Bisailon is one of those rare mirrors and windows books. It's a mirror in the sense that any parent can understand working themselves down to the bone for their child's future, and it's a window, at least for me, into everyday Vietnamese culture and life beyond the glamour shots we see in the movies. With touch points any parent can understand, like wanting your child to get a better education than you did, or wanting them to simply sprout wings and leave the nest, this book kindly and gently reveals a mother-daughter relationship no parent or child will soon forget. I got a chance to talk to Josée about her illustration process, both for this book and in general, and it's an honour to share that conversation here today.

About the book:

A young girl and her mother have a loving, passionate conversation with each other. The girl is torn between her desire to stay home with her family and the familiarity of their village, and her desire to go to school and discover the world beyond the mountains that surround them. Every time the girl insists that she will stay, her mother repeats that she must go, that there is more to life than the labor in the coffee trees.

Let's talk Josée Bisailon!



LTPB: When you received the manuscript for *Ten Cents a Pound*, what about it drew you in? What is your personal connection to this story?

JB: I had the chance to receive two manuscripts from the Editor at Second Story Press. I was blown away by *Ten Cents a Pound*. Usually I take a few days (even a few weeks!) before accepting a manuscript, but for this one, I think I answered back within the hour. I was so excited about it! I felt the story was touching, tender, simple, and so meaningful. I like picture books with strong female characters. This one was a special one. A mother who is willing to do anything for her daughter's education... Being a mother of three kids who have the chance to have a free education in a peaceful country, *Ten Cents a Pound* really got me thinking.

Also, when I received the manuscript, I was preparing a trip to Vietnam with my family. I felt this couldn't be a coincidence, I had to illustrate this wonderful story.



LTPB: You reveal what Mama looks like in a very specific way, one part at a time. Can you talk a little bit about the visual evolution of the characters and why you chose to reveal them in this particular way?

JB: When I first read the manuscript, I felt like I was entering the private life of this mother/daughter duo. This subject is so sensitive, I felt like if we could only see some close-up of the mother at first, it was like preserving her privacy. I know she's only a book character, but I really felt like it! And the more we progress into the book, the more we get to know her, the more we discover her.

LTPB: What kind of research did you do (factually and visually) to get your images right? How did you mix in the realities of your research with your own unique art style?

JB: While doing my research for the book, I was also doing research for my trip, so this was a lot of fun. I had to do the sketches before my trip, then the final artwork when I got back from Vietnam. During my month in Vietnam, I sketched everything I could to try to capture the feel of the place, the smell, the people, landscapes... I took a lot of pictures. I also looked at a lot of pictures on the internet and at the library. Usually, what I found was only pictures of wonderful landscapes, but I had trouble finding pictures of the ordinary life.

It was particularly difficult to find images of coffee workers in Vietnam. Almost every picture I found was a picture of happy, clean and well-dressed people picking coffee fruits. Of course it wasn't what I wanted to represent. I did my best for the sketches, but I had to do some modifications to them when I got back, as I really wanted the artwork to be accurate and respectful of the characters' personalities. I also bought clothes that I scanned and then used the print in the book, like the girl's skirt and the mother's scarf.

LTPB: What did you use to create the illustrations in this book? Is this your preferred medium? How does your process change from book to book?

JB: I use a lot of medium! Usually it's coloured pencils, pastels, cut paper, watercolour/ink and Photoshop. I do all the illustrations and backgrounds traditionally, then I scan it and put them together in Photoshop. For *Ten Cents a Pound*, I wanted to feel the earth, the dirt and dust, but I also wanted to show a certain softness, so I used a lot of charcoal and pastels.

I love using different techniques. It gives me a lot of possibilities. If I want to give a bold feel to a picture book, I can use bold collages. If I want to give a soft feel, I use more pastels, etc. And it leaves a lot of room for accidents and mistakes which sometimes bring me to a whole new world!

LTPB: What are you working on now? Anything you can show us?

JB: I'm working on a lot of projects! I just finished the illustrations for a board book. I'm also working on a picture book written by Jan L. Coates with Running the Goat, a publisher based in Newfoundland. I don't know if I can say something about the text, but I sure can show you some illustrations!

Also, the first book I wrote and illustrated just came out this Fall. I was so excited, yet so nervous! It's in French and it's called *Reviens sur terre Esther!*

And *Ten Cents a Pound* will be out in French in Quebec this month. I'm really happy about it, since French is my first language. My kids will be able to read it!

LTPB: If you were to write your picture book autobiography, who (dead or alive!) would you want to illustrate it, and why?

JB: That's a tough question! There are so many illustrators I admire. Maybe I would say Wolf Erlbruch, since I fell in love with illustrations looking at his work. I found his way of using drawings and cut paper really fascinating, and it got me experimenting this way of working, too.

I think having my life illustrated by Kvetta Pacovska would be pretty amazing, too!

A million thanks to Josée for taking time to answers some questions! *Ten Cents a Pound* published from Second Story Press earlier this year.





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INTERVIEWS WITH JOSÉE BISAILLON

Illustrator's Studio: Josée Bisailon

The Canadian Children's Book Centre, Educators' Newsletter, February 2017

Josée Bisailon has illustrated more than 20 picture books and has done numerous editorial illustrations for magazines and newspapers. Her latest book is *The Snow Knows*, written by Jennifer McGrath. She lives in Montreal, Quebec.

How did you get started as an illustrator?

I have been making art since I was a little girl. I've always drawn, made collages, created some artistic installations or written stories as long as I can remember. Back then I didn't even know that illustration could be a career! In fact, it's like all of the artistic works that were around me were created by some magical people. I didn't have any artists around me, so I just didn't figure being an artist was an option; it just didn't exist. When I was younger I wanted to be a veterinarian, like my father. I soon realized that wasn't for me. I preferred drawing animals to taking care of them. (To tell you the truth, I was too afraid of blood!!)

When I had to choose a career, I figured that being a designer would be a good fit, so I studied computer graphics in college. It felt like the right place. I discovered that I liked it and was good at it. So that's when I decided I wanted to be a graphic designer. I really liked school, so I pursued my studies and went to the Université du Québec à Montréal in graphic design. I really like to do conceptual design and play with typography. In this program, we had to take illustrations classes. That's where I met illustrator Michèle Lemieux, and I can say now that it changed my life! She saw something in me and she encouraged me to take illustration classes as an option. I tried probably all of the mediums that you can think of in Michèle's classes: oil painting, watercolour, pen, ink, everything! But being able to play and mix all of this together was pure joy. After, I had the chance to have Pol Turgeon as an illustration teacher. He pushed me to work really hard, always challenging me, encouraging me to go deeper in my explorations, and that's when I realized I couldn't be anything else but an illustrator. I was really into editorial illustrations (I worked for a couple of years at *The Globe and Mail* at the beginning of my career), but a few months after graduating, I had my first illustration assignment for a picture book (*Le vampire qui aimait le lait* at Les 400 coups). That's where my career as a picture book illustrator began!

Can you tell us about your illustration style and how it came about? What is your illustration process and where do you find inspiration?

I probably tried every medium in Michele Lemieux's classes, but none of them really was my cup of tea. One day she came to class with a bunch of picture books, and she showed us a book by Wolf Erlbruch. I fell in love with his art, so Michele suggested I try to imitate his style. That's where I discovered collage. My style has evolved a lot since university. I used to use a lot of tape and black pastels. It was dirty and dark. Now it's softer. But I still use the same technique. I like to explore with different mediums. I use everything that you can think of for making art: crayons, pen, ink, watercolour, pastels, cut paper, fabrics.... I draw, paint and cut by hand, then I scan everything and do the final montage digitally. I like to use Photoshop because it gives me more opportunities. For example, I can draw something bigger than it appears on the illustration, or I can change the colours.

When it comes to illustrating a picture book, my process is pretty simple. I'll do some quick thumbnail sketches after I read the manuscript. I then work on them and make modifications on tracing paper until I'm satisfied with the result. Once I'm happy with the thumbnails, I scan and enlarge them. I print them and do the final sketches on tracing paper with a pencil. I use the same tracing paper to transfer the illustration parts to the bits of paper I will use to do the final art pieces in collage. Once every piece is ready, I scan them and do the final montage in Photoshop.

My inspiration really comes from everywhere. I read a lot—it gets my imagination going. I like to take a walk when I need to think about new ideas. I also find inspiration in movies and photos when the time comes to choose different perspectives. I like to see my work on a picture book as a short film. It needs to have different points of view, different perspectives, and a narrative that is similar to a movie. Music is also a big part of my inspiration (like in a movie). Listening to different kinds of music while I'm working has a big effect on my work. I'll choose the mood I want to give to the book and will find the music that fits well with it. I'll listen to this playlist during the whole process.

You'll be touring Newfoundland during TD Canadian Children's Book Week in May. Have you been to Newfoundland before? What are you looking forward to the most, and what can students expect from your presentations?

It will be my first time in Newfoundland and I'm so excited about it! I'm looking forward to meeting the kids and teacher and sharing my work with them. Hopefully, I'll have some time to visit a bit and I expect to do a lot of sketchbook illustrations of the beautiful landscapes.

Teachers and students will learn more about my process. People are always curious to see how I work in collage, so I'll make sure to bring some original art. I'll share with them the mediums I use. They'll also see that ideas don't come to me like magic; I'll show them how I get my imagination going in my sketchbooks. My presentations are always casual and relaxed, and I hope the kids will want to create something of their own after seeing my presentation.

Do you have any activity suggestions or tips for teachers who would like to use your books in the classroom?

Teachers can ask their students to create something using only paper, glue and scissors. Using scissors helps students create something different than what they are used to. Kids are sometimes afraid of mistakes, and when they use pencils, they tend to keep erasing their drawings until they feel they're perfect. They cannot do that with cut paper, and it makes them think differently.

Using *Mom, Dad, Our Books, and Me* (also available in French: *Papa, maman, nos livres et moi*), I'm encouraging teachers to talk about the different ways of reading with their students. Kids can describe their favourite reading spots and then recreate them in collages, using old magazines to include some printed text in the art.

Do you have any advice for aspiring children's book illustrators?

The thing with illustration is if you don't work hard you won't get anywhere. It's not enough to be good at drawing. You need to work hard (really, really hard). And find your own style. It's good to look at what other illustrators or artists that you like are doing. Try to find out how they do it and find your own way of doing it. And it doesn't need to be perfect, because imperfection is good; it makes the art alive. So explore, work hard and be nice to people!





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AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

2024

Society of Illustrators New York 66 (poster for New York City Transit-MTA), USA

David Booth Children's and Youth Poetry Award, finalist (*I Want to Build a Seahouse*), Canada

2023

Chocolate Lily Book Award, finalist (*Poem in My Pocket*), Canada

IODE Jean Throop Book Award, finalist (*Sometimes I Feel Like a River*), Canada

2022

Canadian Taste Awards, Food Storytelling Category, finalist (*Dans ma cuisine*), Canada

David Booth Children's and Youth Poetry Award, (*A Great Big Night*), Canada

2021

Information Book Award, winner (*The Boreal Forest*), Canada

2020

Governor General's Literary Awards, finalist (*Out Into The Big Wide Lake*), Canada

Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award, finalist (*Dancing With Daisy*), Canada

Best Informational Books for Older Readers, Chicago Public Library, winner (*The Boreal Forest*), USA

2019

Governor General's Literary Award, finalist (*Le pelleteur de nuages*), Canada

3X3 illustration Awards, honourable mention (*Dans la chambre des merveilles*), USA

Prix Harry Black, finalist (*Le pelleteur de nuages*), Canada

2018

Illustration Prize, Trois-Rivières Book Fair (*Ma tête en l'air*), Canada

Blue Spruce Award, finalist (*Milo and Georgie*), Canada

2017

Applied Arts Illustration Awards (*Biodiversité-océan*), Canada

Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award (*The Snow Knows*), Canada

2016

Creative Quarterly 45, winner (*Biodiversité-océan*), USA

Creative Quarterly 45, finalist (*Biodiversité-forêt*), USA

2015

Illustration Prize, Trois-Rivières Book Fair (*Monsieur Tralalère*), Canada

2013

Creative Quarterly 32 (*Cabrioles et ritournelles*), USA

Society of Illustrators New York 55 (*J'ai un bouton sur le bout de la langue*), USA

American Illustration (*Cabrioles et ritournelles*), USA

2012

Cybils Awards (*Bookspeak!*), USA

American Illustration (*J'ai un bouton sur le bout de la langue*), USA

White Ravens (*Bookspeak!*), Germany

Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts (*Bookspeak!*), USA

Minnesota Book Award (*Bookspeak!*), USA

Best Children's Books of the Year by the Children's Book Committee (*The Great Moon Hoax*), USA

2011

Chronos Literature Prize, finalist (*Mon Papi*), France

2010

Governor General's Literary Awards, finalist (*Le funambule*), Canada

Society of Illustrators New York 52 (*Le funambule*), USA

Moonbeam Children's Book Awards, gold medal (*Benno and the Night of Broken Glass*), USA

Illustration Prize, Trois-Rivières Book Fair (*Mon Papi*), Canada

2009

American Illustration 28 (*Le vrai de vrai journal de ma vie*), USA

Applied Arts Illustration Awards, Canada

2008

Governor General's Literary Awards, finalist (*Les habits presque neufs de l'empereur*), Canada

Applied Arts Illustration Awards, Canada

LUX Illustration Awards, Canada

2006

Applied Arts Illustration Awards, Canada

2005

Applied Arts Illustration Awards, Canada

LUX Illustration Awards, Canada





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FOREIGN RIGHTS & TRANSLATIONS

Papa, maman, nos livres et moi

Les 400 coups, text by Danielle Marcotte

Translation: Arab (Egypt), Spanish (Bolivia), Chinese, Korean

Foreign rights sold: Turkish (Turkey only), Italian (World), English (World: Owlkids Books)

Ma tête en l'air

Fonfon, text by Danielle Chaperon

Foreign rights and translation: Chinese-Simplified (Beijing Green Beans Books), Turkish (MULTIBEM)

Monsieur Tralalère

Fonfon, text by Natalie Ferraris

Chinese-Simplified (Shanghai Juvenile & Children's Publishing House)

Reviens sur terre, Esther !

St-Jean Éditeur, text and illustrations by Josée Bisailon

English (World: Nimbus Publishing)

The Boreal Forest: A Year in the World's Largest Land Biome

Kids Can Press, text by L.E. Carmichael

Translation: Russian

Leap!

Kids Can Press, text by JonArno Lawson

Translation: Chinese (simplified)

Winter's Coming: A Story of Seasonal Change

Owlkids Books, text by Jan Thornhill

Translation: Dutch, Chinese-simplified, Turkish, Korean

Ten Cents a Pound

Second Story Press, text by Nhung N. Tran-Davies

Translation: French (Bayard)





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