

DIPLOMA PROJECT

I Love Earth! : Illustrating Picture Books For Early Learners

Sponsor : KATHA, New Delhi

STUDENT : ROSHINI TERESA POCHONT

PROGRAMME : POST-GRADUATE DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

GUIDE : AJAY TIWARI

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COMMUNICATION DESIGN FACULTY (GRAPHIC DESIGN)



राष्ट्रीय डिज़ाइन संस्थान
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DESIGN

The Evaluation Jury recommends ROSHINI TERESA POCHONT for the

Diploma of the National Institute of Design

IN COMMUNICATION DESIGN (GRAPHIC DESIGN)

herewith, for the project titled "I LOVE EARTH! : ILLUSTRATING PICTURE BOOKS FOR EARLY LEARNERS"

on fulfilling the further requirements by

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Chairman

Members :

*Subsequent remarks regarding fulfilling the requirements :

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November 2014

I LOVE EARTH!

Illustrating Picture Books For Early Learners

A PROJECT FOR KATHA, NEW DELHI

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With Gratitude...

To the National Institute of Design, for welcoming me with love, support and encouragement when I had no idea what I was getting into.

To the Faculty, Administrative Staff and Support Staff at NID, for the warmth and guidance throughout my stay here. To the Faculty of the Graphic Design discipline, for their patience and constant motivation, and for introducing me to the wonders of the visual realm.

To Sakshi Jain and everyone at KATHA, for giving me such an amazing project, and for the trust and belief they put in me to carry it out.

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To Immanuel Suresh, for being a steadfast refuge and a beacon of light during my time at NID, and for the

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To Diya Purkayastha and Jasmin Kalsi, for shedding light on the intriguing minds of their preschool daughters.

To my idols Oliver Jeffers, Maurice Sendak, Hayao Miyazaki, Shaun Tan, Prashant Miranda, Quentin Blake and Mary Blair, for helping me realize that illustration is my true calling.

To the many illustrators whose work I have been inspired by: Phoebe Wahl, John Hendrix, Princesse Camcam (Camille Garoche), Rilla Alexander, Rajiv Eipe, Prabha Mallia, Scott Campbell, Melissa Sweet, Isabelle Arsenault, Jon Klassen, Beatrice Allemagna, Marisol, Kelly Barstow, U Jung, Juliette Oberndorfer, Nuria Tamarit, Stian Hole, Julia Sarda, Carter Goodrich, Peter Brown, Vaibhav Kumaresh, Debasish Deb, Samuel Ribeyron, Jean 'Moebius' Giraud, Souther Salazar, and Simone Rea.

To Pixar, Laika, Studio Ghibli, Disney, Gobelins School, Wes Anderson and Michel Gondry for making the most awe-inspiring movies, most of which have indirectly inspired the work in this project.

To my classmates and batchmates, for a fantastic three-year journey.

A close-up, warm-toned photograph of two young boys sitting together and reading a book. The boy on the left has brown hair and freckles, wearing a green and yellow patterned shirt with a 'POP' button. The boy on the right has brown hair and wears large black-rimmed glasses and a blue patterned shirt. They are both looking down at an open book with a colorful illustration of a landscape. The lighting is soft and intimate, highlighting their faces and the texture of the book pages.

"Reading is a tactile
experience, and never more
so than in childhood, as
our first encounters with
covers and spines and
illustrations are imprinted
on our minds."

- ALIX OHLIN -

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A GRAPHIC DESIGNER IN ILLUSTRATOR'S SHOES

THE NID EXPERIENCE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

National Institute of Design

PALDI CAMPUS, AHMEDABAD

The National Institute of Design (NID) is internationally acclaimed as one of the foremost multi-disciplinary institutions in the field of design education and research.

The institute functions as an autonomous body under the department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. NID is recognised by the Dept. of Scientific & Industrial Research (DSIR) under Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India, as a scientific and industrial design research organisation.

Graphic design at NID plays many roles, as effective information-dispenser, communicator and persuader. Development of conceptual thinking as well as traditional design skills are given equal emphasis during the course at the institute. Graphic design offers different areas of study such as typography, illustration, publication design, identity design, branding, and information design.



I LOVE EARTH!

Illustrating Picture Books For Early Learners

Project Synopsis

AN OVERVIEW

KATHA is a non-profit organization in New Delhi that has run successful education programmes as well as a reputed publishing house since 1988. Its mission has been to enhance the joy of reading for children and adults, and to help children realize their full potential.

Katha has combatted social injustice and poverty with active story-based learning and quality education through its lab schools and learning programmes. It has published more than 300 titles in 21 Indian languages till date.

The diploma project opportunity was offered by Katha as a distance work project, to be executed from Ahmedabad. The project involved the creation of illustrations for a series of picture books, for a set of poems based on the theme 'I Love Earth!' These books would also contain activities and games based on the poems, and would be packaged as a learning kit for preschool children, within the age group of 2 to 4.

The project offered the chance to not only explore and experiment with illustration – a long-time personal passion – but also look at book design and interpretation of grand themes such as earth and nature awareness for young children.

The design process involved research into the background and context of the project, inspiration-gathering and explorations in illustration styles and treatments, and planning and execution of the books.

The initial stages of the project involved gathering information on existing children's books on the themes of earth and nature, studying preschooler interests and behavioural patterns, and analysing how picture books play a vital role in children's early learning.

The evolution of children's book illustration over the years was also examined, and insights were gleaned from the work and process of illustrators in the field.

The poems were illustrated by first interpreting the texts into visual ideas, using brainstorming and moodboards to create concept libraries. Styles and treatments were explored through rough sketches and storyboards, and concepts were refined and finalized based on the strength of ideas in conveying the themes of the poems.

The final illustrations were created following streamlining and feedback, and the final book designs executed with the inclusion of activity spreads based on the illustrations, as well proposed options for overall packaging of the series.

The project served as an ideal diploma experience in two ways: it was both an exciting challenge and a great learning opportunity. While there were personal struggles concerning validation of work and maintaining a healthy work ethic according to a timed framework, it has also been a journey of happy discoveries and new paths of interest uncovered.

On Happy Beginnings

PICTURE BOOKS AND ME: A JOURNEY



This sketch of myself from my childhood, absorbed in the unending wonders of the 'big book box' at home, perfectly sums up the long and winding journey I've taken to arrive at my passion and excitement for illustration, specifically illustration for picture books.

I was lucky to have been fed the reading and 'being creative' habit from an early age. The initial doll-and-toy birthday gifts were gradually replaced by story books, crayon sets and make-and-do craft books, and I could not have asked for anything better.

I think I still enjoy making art because it gives me the feeling that I can create whatever I want; a sense of freedom and power and also complete joy, limitless and without restraints. A blank page is my playground, and I love getting lost in all its potential wonders and beautiful messes.

As a result of all this, the amassed collection of children's books at home is quite large,

ranging from second-hand vintage pop-up books to whole piles of Ladybird story books and old comics, all bound up in thick volumes that I spent hours with, my nose buried in the rich pages bursting with colour and wild stories.

Over the years, my collection of picture books has grown silently in the background, making room for graphic novels and more sophisticated works in the recent past.

I came to illustration much later in life, after a series of varied interests and career paths, but I think it was inevitable, as my foundation was set in words and pictures.

To be able to work on picture book illustration for my diploma project has been nothing short of a blessing and a great opportunity, for which I have been very grateful. Here's to happy beginnings!

KATHA, New Delhi

TRANSLATING STORIES, TRANSFORMING LIVES

KATHA



Photo: Ramachandran Rajagopal, KATHA.org

KATHA is a non-profit organization working with and in story and storytelling since 1988, and now has more than 300 published titles in 21 Indian languages.

Its mission is to enhance the joy of reading for children and adults, and to help children realize their full potential. Katha has also combatted social injustice and poverty through active story-based learning, quality education and community action.

To date, through its many programmes, Katha has brought schooling to 162,500 children, trained 17,000 of them in IT, taught 90,000 women in income-generation and social activism skills, and brought the joy of reading to more than 6,000,000 children.

On the other end of the creative spectrum is Katha's publishing programme, which produces books that create spaces for culturally distinctive literature and celebrate the polyphonous multiplicity that is India.



GEETA DHARMARAJAN

Geeta is a writer, editor, educationist, and the founder and Executive Director of Katha. She received the Padma Shri Award for her work in education and literature in 2012. Her published works include more than 30 children's books.

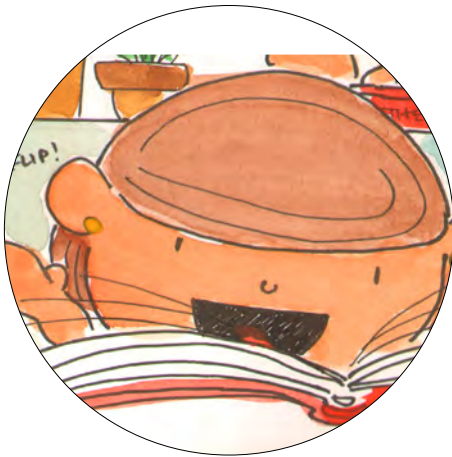


SAKSHI JAIN

Sakshi is the Art Director at Katha. She is a graduate of the National Institute of Design, and formerly interned at Nickelodeon. Sakshi has guided and mentored me for the diploma project.

Finalizing the project

OPPORTUNITIES & DECISIONS



To decide on a diploma project, it was necessary to zero in on a field of interest that would not only further a personal passion for a skill but also offer an opportunity for in-depth learning and exploration, within the extended domain of graphic design and image-making.

Following the application to Katha for project opportunities that involved illustration, the Art Director, Sakshi Jain, wrote back with a couple of options to work on illustrations for children's books.

After discussing what would best be suited to a diploma project at NID – while meeting the academic requirements as well – Sakshi agreed with the chosen option, which would involve creating illustrations for a series of books under an upcoming series on the theme 'I Love Earth!' It would be scheduled for November 2014 release.

Based on the initial brief that Sakshi had provided, the project proposal was fleshed

out to reflect the direction the project would take in terms of the different stages, objectives, and a rough timeline.

Giving structure to the process at the start also provided a personal framework within which to maintain a planned workflow.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

To develop illustrations for a set of six picture books as part of an 'I Love Earth!' series early-learning kit, aimed at preschool children in the age group of two to four.

Proposed collateral components include flash cards, colouring books, games and activities, and overall packaging of the kit.

June 1 – September 30 (Four months)

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

CONTEXTUAL STUDY: Understanding the context of the proposed series of books for children; conducting research on existing work done with similar audiences; explorations in various mediums and styles of illustration.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT: Utilizing insights gained during the initial research stage to generate ideas for the end-deliverables; designing prototypes and testing concepts with the target audience.

DESIGN EXECUTION: Taking the design ideas and concepts through to the final execution stage; creating refined illustrations and designs to prepare for print production and publication.

DOCUMENTATION: A weblog and print documentation of the entire process of the diploma project, with the various stages charted out.

Ajay Tiwari of the Animation Film Design discipline was approached to be the academic guide for the diploma project.

OVERVIEW OF TIMELINE

	MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3	MONTH 4
CONTEXTUAL STUDY				
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT				
DESIGN EXECUTION				
DOCUMENTATION				



ABOUT THE PROJECT GUIDE

AJAY TIWARI is a graduate of NID and a faculty in the Animation Film Design discipline at NID since 2008.

He has taught courses across disciplines, such as Film Language, Experimental Animation and Elements of Moving Images.

Ajay was chosen as the project guide for his expertise with illustration and animation techniques, as well as his research interests in the applied aspects of animation in education and social communication.



A painted wall at the KATHA Lab School in Govindpuri, New Delhi

Overview of Design Process

FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROJECT

CONTEXT: THE TODDLER'S WORLD

- Preschoolers' behaviour and interests
- Games and activities: getting kids excited about earth and nature

BACKGROUND: ONE PAGE AT A TIME

- Children's books on earth and nature
- Level of comprehension for age group

EXPLORING ILLUSTRATION

- Words and Pictures
- Experimenting with illustration
- Inspiration: studying illustrators' work
- Resources: books/media on process
- Observation and life studies
- Image-making techniques for kids

The Toddler's World

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PRESCHOOLER

Young children these days lead busy lives. Their days are filled with everything from school field trips and art projects to dance classes and regulated TV viewing schedules.

After receiving the project brief from Katha, it was evident that it would be crucial to develop an understanding – as much as the project timeline framework would allow – into how children in the age-group of 2 to 4 years old perceive and interpret their world.

This investigation would help make sense of how picture books on themes like earth and nature could be best suited to their appeal.

Preschoolers have been described as curious, emotional, temperamental, impulsive, over-active, creative and sensitive; they love to pretend play and are beginning to form independent stances. Against this backdrop, the challenge would be to effectively use illustration and activity-based learning to get them excited about nature and the earth.

“Preschoolers love the process of creating. Any chance to draw, paint, paste, sing or dance will probably be met with great enthusiasm.”

– RAISING CHILDREN NETWORK
(AUSTRALIAN PARENTING SITE) –



One page at a time

CHILDREN'S BOOKS ON EARTH & NATURE

It was decided that another important aspect to be probed through the course of the project would be a review of existing children's books – specifically, illustrated picture books – available on similar themes of earth protection and conservation, from both local and foreign publishing houses.

Such a review would aid in the development of illustrations for the project based on a clear understanding of what has already been done in terms of content and styles, and what can be explored or avoided for preschool readers.

This stage of the project would also help shed light on how picture books have tackled subjects like this without being over-moralizing or too preachy.

Looking at picture books for this age-group would also help explore how these subjects can be made to fit into their level of comprehension, without too much simplification or use of clichés.

Picture books have always proven to be a powerful tool in getting young children interested in a variety of concepts and ideas. By analysing how the best of these books have succeeded in doing this, the project would have a stronger base off which the final image-making could be built and developed further.



Words and Pictures

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF ILLUSTRATION

Illustration, as a unique relationship between word and image, has been a personal interest that developed into a full-blown passion in recent years.

The project offered an exciting opportunity to explore image-making for a demanding yet intriguing audience, and to experiment with different styles and mediums to interpret the poems for young readers.

The plan would be to approach the process by building a foundation of inspiration and resources, based on the work of illustrators working in the field of children's illustration, as well from books and other media that shed light on the craft of illustration.

Another challenge would be to come up with styles and treatments for the poems that would get children excited about trying these themselves. Looking at how preschoolers play and engage in creative activity would also help inspire the direction that the illustrations would take.

"Ask your child: 'What do you see?' Your conversation may lead into a story from the child about who is in the picture and what is happening on the page. Allow meaning to arise organically."

– JEN BERLINGO, CREATIVE
& COMPASSIONATE
PSYCHOTHERAPY –





Entrance to the KATHA Lab School in Govindpuri

Getting Started

COLLECTING & COLLATING INFORMATION

BUILDING BLOCKS

- Resource books/websites on illustration

TURNING THE PAGE

- Books for kids on earth and nature
- Foreign vs. Indian Publishing

THE EARTH AND ME

- How children perceive earth and nature

MAKING A MESS

- Explorations in Illustration

TYING IT TOGETHER

- Planning for a series of books

LEARNING FROM THE MASTERS

- Illustration Inspiration
- Reference collection

Building Blocks

RESOURCE BOOKS & WEBSITES

The diploma project opportunity offered a first step into children's book illustration, an unknown yet inviting territory that was waiting for further exploration and learning.

In order to build more knowledge about the field, a wide range of resource books and websites about illustration and image-making was gathered and built up into an indispensable collection. These books and websites served as guides and motivators throughout the project, helping keep the process on track.

The resource collection delivered valuable insights into the process of illustration, as well as inspiring examples of the experimental and innovative styles of illustration that have entered children's books in recent years.

LITTLE BIG BOOKS is a showcase of some of the best examples of contemporary children's picture book illustrators, with beautifully laid-out spreads for each artist.

ILLUSTRATING CHILDREN'S BOOKS by Martin Salisbury balances examples of illustration with how-tos and helpful tips about the process of illustrating for children, including chapters that address character development and coming up with concepts and ideas.

WRITING WITH PICTURES by Uri Shulevitz turned out to be one of the most important resources over the course of the project. The book explores every aspect of the children's book illustration process from start to finish, showing examples from the author's own work and his experiences in the field.

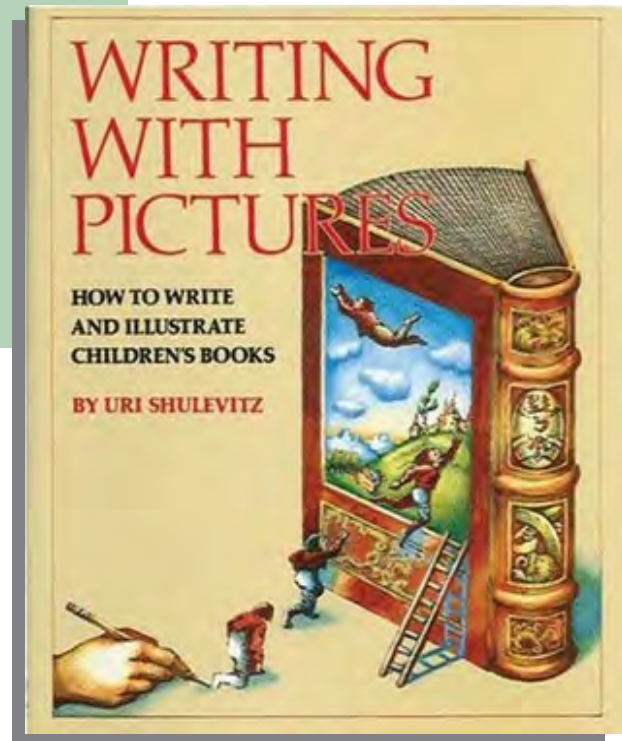
THE INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DIGITAL LIBRARY (ICDL) was another major resource and a constant inspiration. It pools the best work in children's illustration from around the world into a rich and diverse collection, often from lesser-known countries and languages.

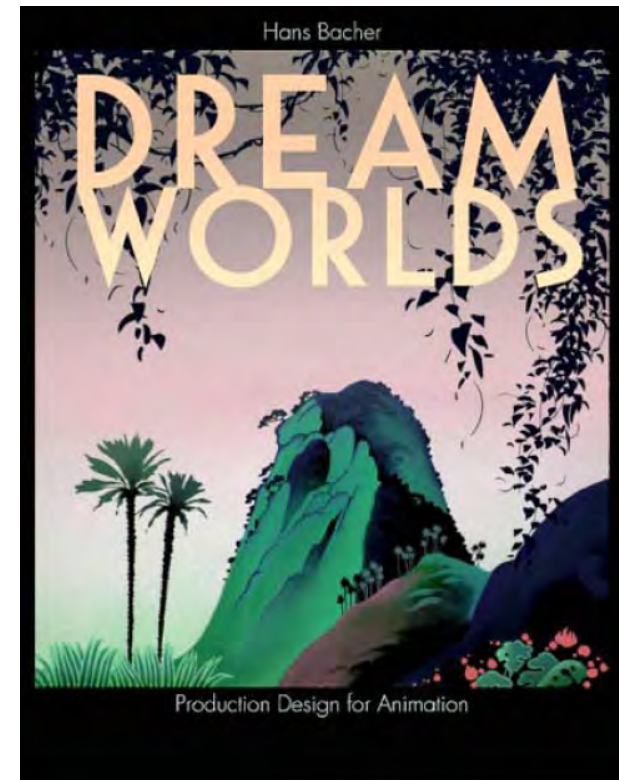
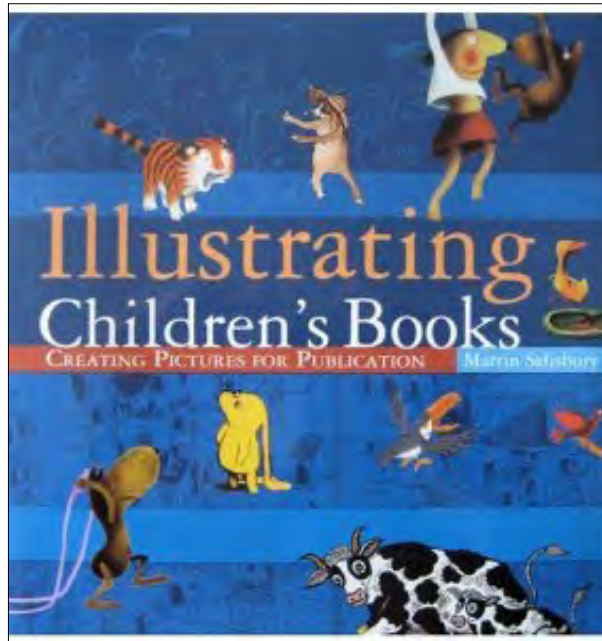
"A picture book is like a silent film."

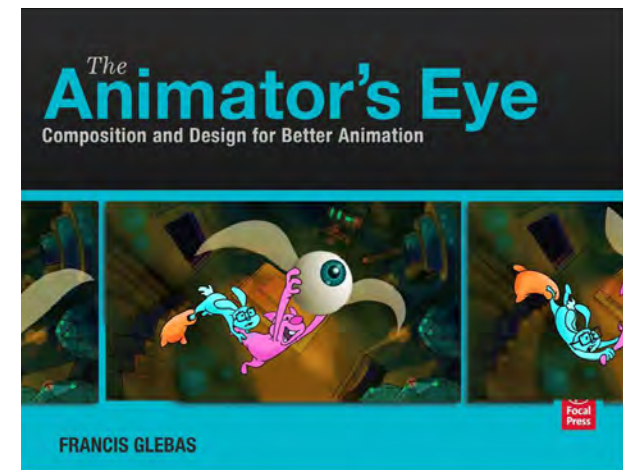
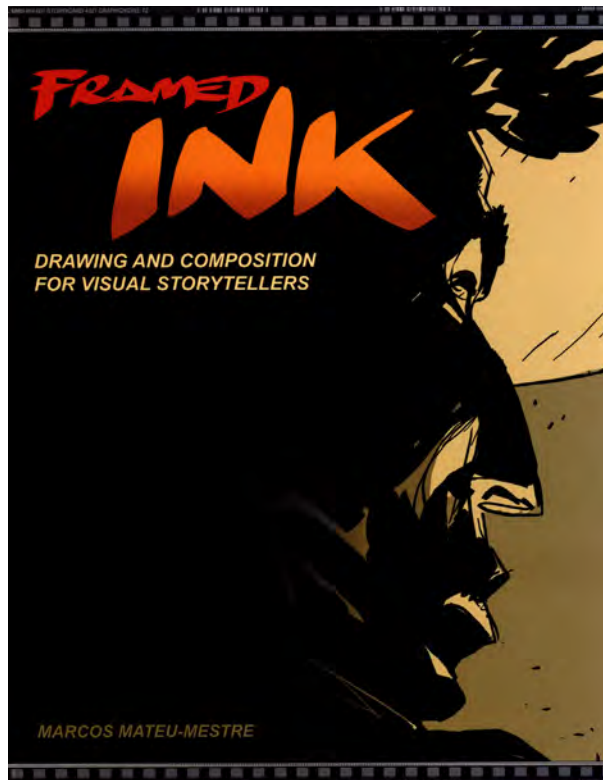
"Imagine that you are literally entering the world that you are creating...try to consider everything 'living' - the whole picture as a living entity."

"Keep the final illustrations as fresh and spontaneous as the first rough sketches."

- URI SHULEVITZ, WRITING WITH PICTURES -









THE INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DIGITAL LIBRARY

(<http://en.childrenslibrary.org>)

A massive database of children's picture books from contributors around the world, featuring rare books in languages like Persian and Korean



SEVEN IMPOSSIBLE THINGS BEFORE BREAKFAST

(<http://blaine.org/sevenimpossiblethings>)

A blog run by Julie Danielson, it features illustrator interviews and reviews of children's picture books



SAFFRON TREE

(<http://www.saffrontree.org/>)

Founded by Praba Ram, a blog that hosts reviews of children's books by parents and guest bloggers, with a focus on Indian children's books and work from local publishing houses

Turning the Page

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN ON EARTH & NATURE

Themes like caring for the earth and building a better world have been some of the most recurrent and popular ideas in the world of children's books. The majority of books for young audiences are concerned with nature, in one way or another.

In collating a list of popular children's picture books about the earth and nature for the project, it was found that these works perform an effective dual purpose: they not only offer a glimpse into a child's most immediate and lively environment, but also get children involved in the pages of the book and the act of reading.

For the child to see the picture book as a gateway to a lush and imaginative world is the perfect way to kick-start the healthy habit of reading at an early age as well.

Some of the books that stood out from the compilation of various books on nature themes were a couple of Katha's own publications, EARTHSONG and GUESS

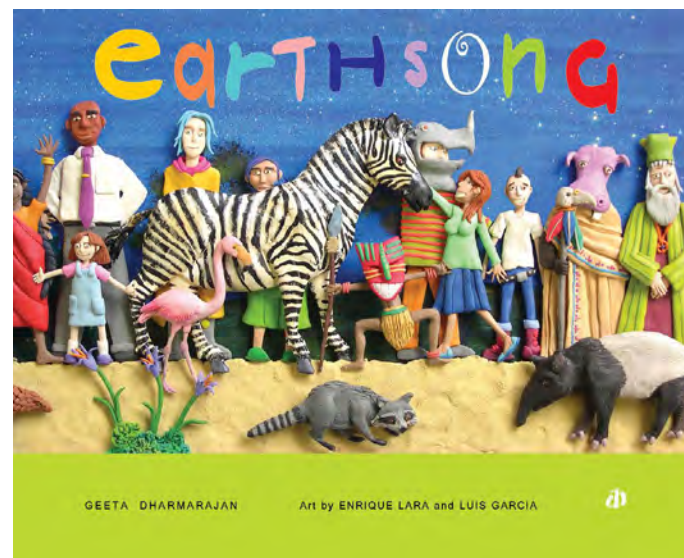
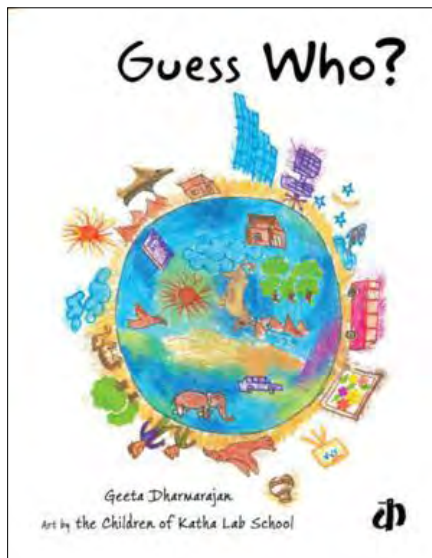
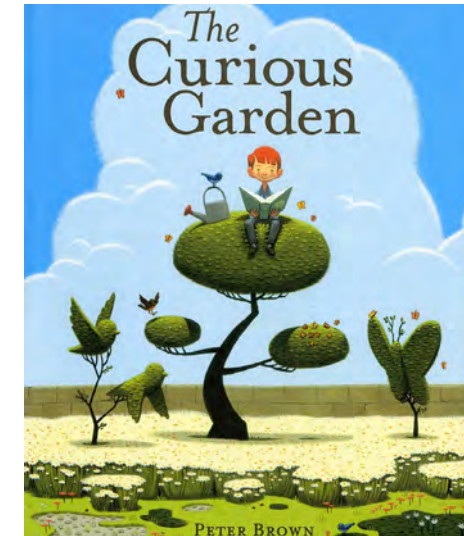
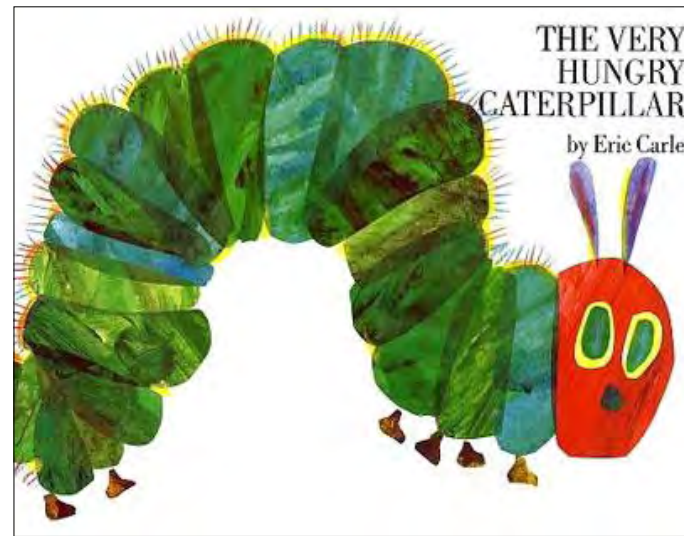
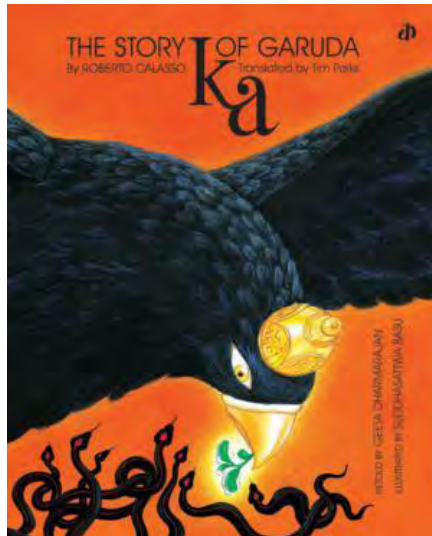
WHO, which make use of beautiful and unique illustrations.

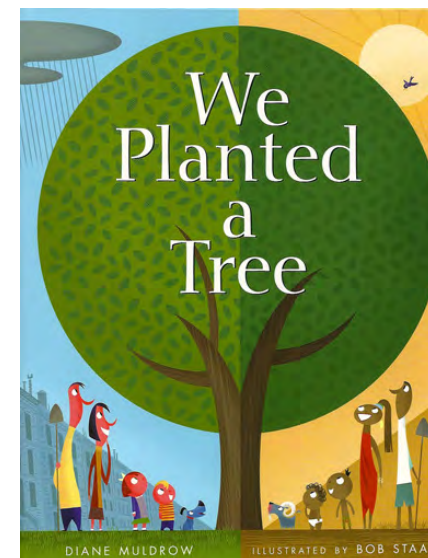
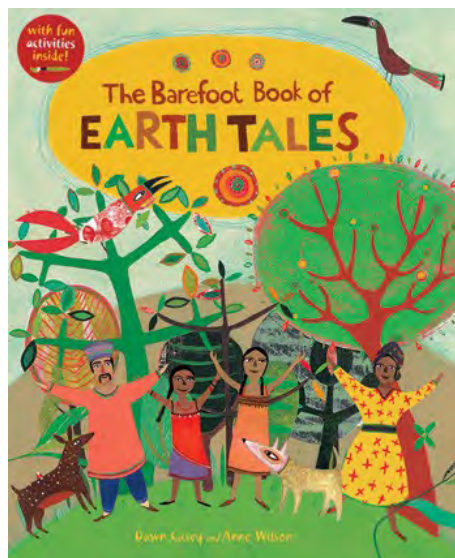
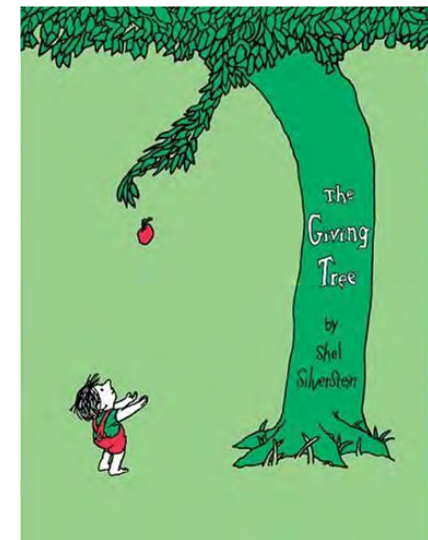
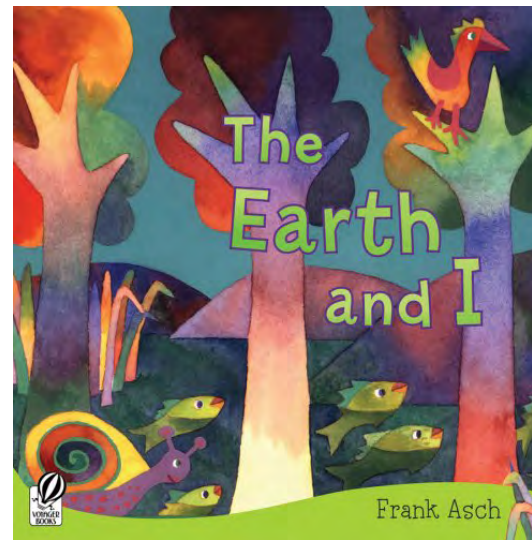
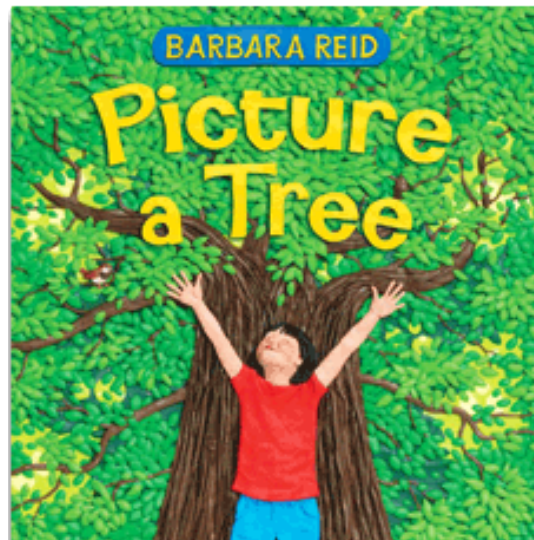
It was also inspiring to see a variety of styles and mediums used in depicting environmental themes, such as clay, paper collage and watercolours.

FOREIGN VS. INDIAN BOOKS

At first glance, the comparisons between picture books from foreign and Indian publishing houses seem limited to minor differences in printing quality and overall book design.

However, it was observed that foreign picture books cover a wider range of themes and ideas about earth and nature, without coming across as too moralistic like some Indian publications might tend to do.





The Earth and Me

HOW CHILDREN PERCEIVE THE WORLD

Some of the more interesting corners of research that were explored during the project were the discoveries made into how young children perceive and understand the natural world around them.

Studies have suggested that children tend to interact with their environments in close, connected ways, and through special 'places of initiation' where they form an early and lasting bond with nature, in the words of naturalist Robert Michael Pyle.

An analysis done by Israeli researcher Rachel Sebba in 1991 suggested that children experience the natural environment "in a deep and direct manner." Her words echo Dan Chiras, who talks about children and their 'micro world' interactions.

These insights offer support to the theory that children are already in tune with the earth from an early age, and only require regular stimulants, such as books and art, to remind them to reconnect with nature.

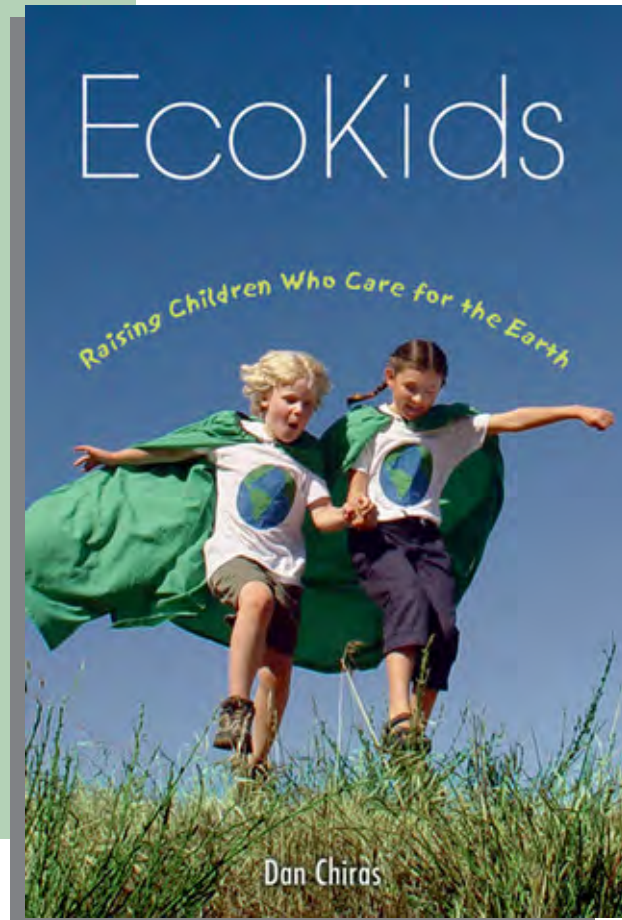
"We do know that when people talk about the disconnect between children and nature... they recall those 'places of initiation,' where they may have first sensed with awe and wonder the largeness of the world, seen and unseen."

– CHILD AND NATURE NETWORK (CNN), 2008 REPORT –

"Kids live their early lives on a different scale... While we stroll along taking in the grand vistas, feeling uplifted, they're on their hands and knees exploring the micro world around them."

"Children experience nature not as background for events, but rather as a stimulating experiential component of their activities. The total sensory experience of touch, sight, smell, hearing needs to be present so it can become part of the world of imagination and wonder."

– DAN CHIRAS, ECOKIDS –



Making a Mess

EXPLORATIONS IN ILLUSTRATION

A few weeks into the project, following the initial information collection stage, Sakshi shared the texts of the six poems that form the 'I Love Earth!' series, along with layout dummies that showed the pagination and rough outline for the books.

Each poem is based on a theme that ties up into the larger idea of loving the earth. The six titles are:

- Where is Earth?
- Water is Me!
- Where is Air?
- I am Me!
- Happy in my Space!
- Who is better?

Based on broad themes from the contents of each, the poems were then categorized as six major ideas: Earth, Water, Air, Me, Space, and Friends & World.

These ideas would eventually be built upon and further developed as concepts

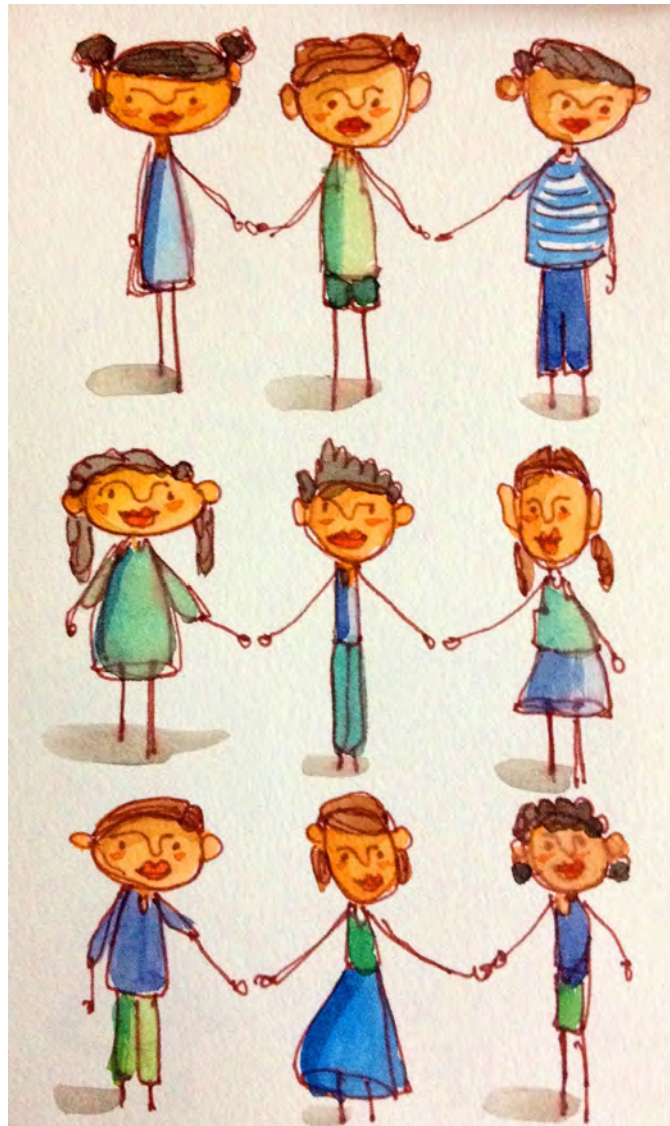
for the final illustrations. Sakshi also emphasized that they would be interested in the idea of having a different style of illustration for each poem, with the theme of each suggesting the direction for the illustrations. For example, the images for the 'Air' poem would have a quality of lightness and breeziness to them.

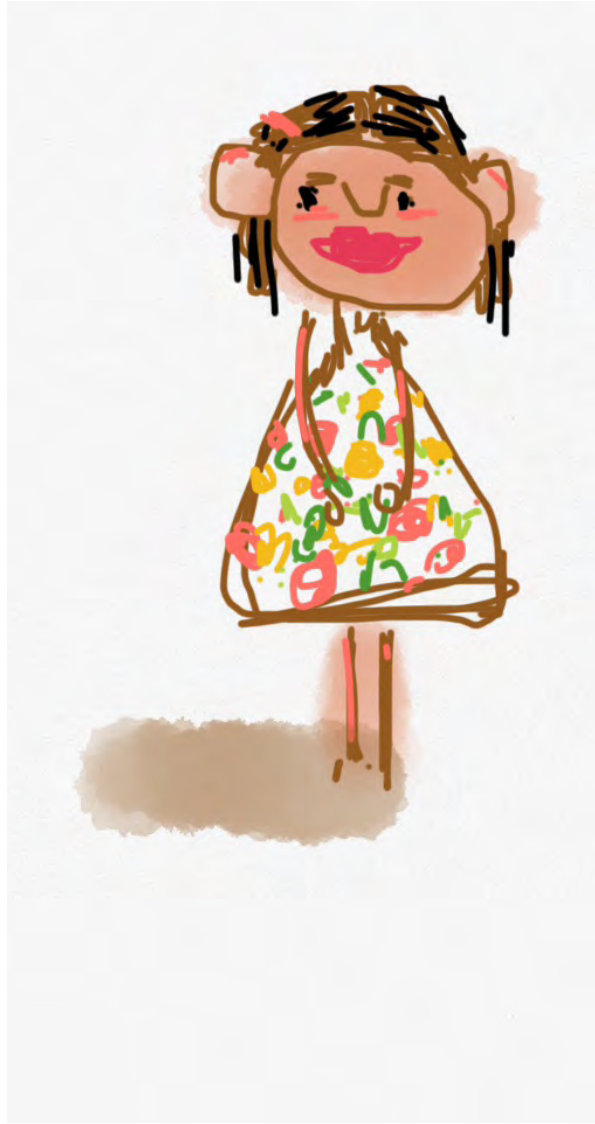
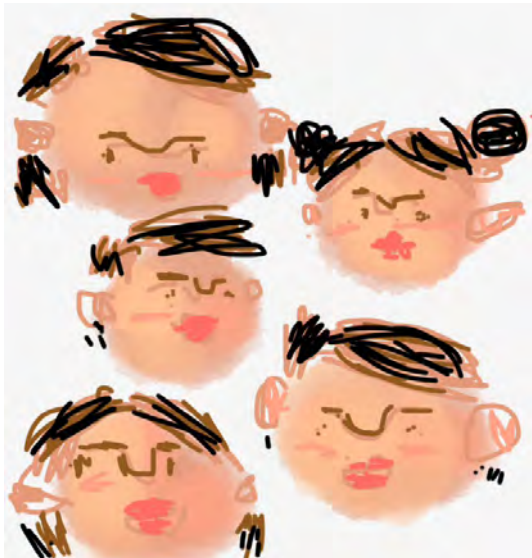
It was added that the illustrations should encourage preschoolers to make art themselves, and to replicate or experiment with the images further, beyond the reading of the book.

Some of the early explorations in styles and treatments involved rough try-outs in traditional media such as watercolours, coloured pencils, and collage, along with a few experiments in digital painting.

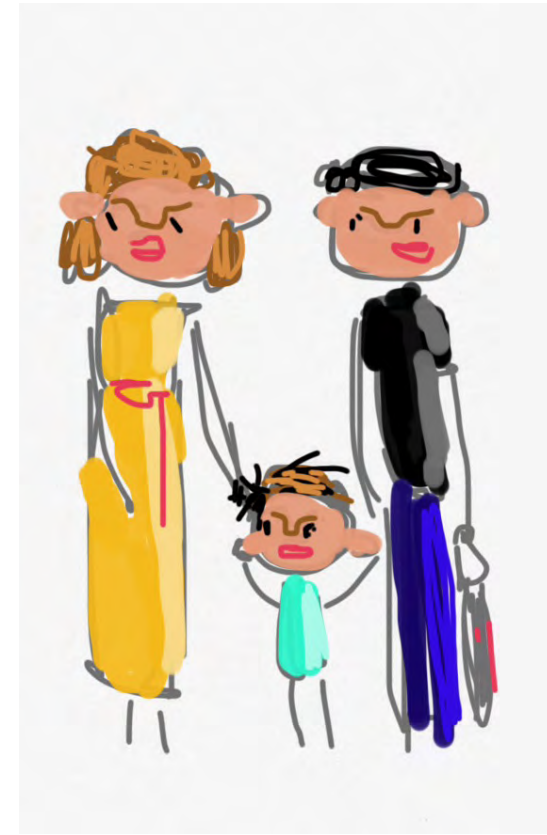
The focus was on creating simple compositions in order to prepare for later, more detailed explorations.

WATERCOLOUR
EXPLORATIONS





DIGITAL EXPLORATIONS



COLOURED PENCIL EXPLORATIONS





COLLAGE EXPLORATIONS



Tying it Together

PLANNING FOR A SERIES OF BOOKS

One of the main aspects that needed to be kept in mind through the course of the project was coming up with and sustaining a strong visual language across the books.

While they each represent distinct, singular themes, the poems also form parts of a larger series, and should hence be identifiable as a unified whole.

One way of maintaining the feel of a 'series' would be by basing the visual language on some particular unifying elements, such as colour, characters, structure, or the flow of the narrative.

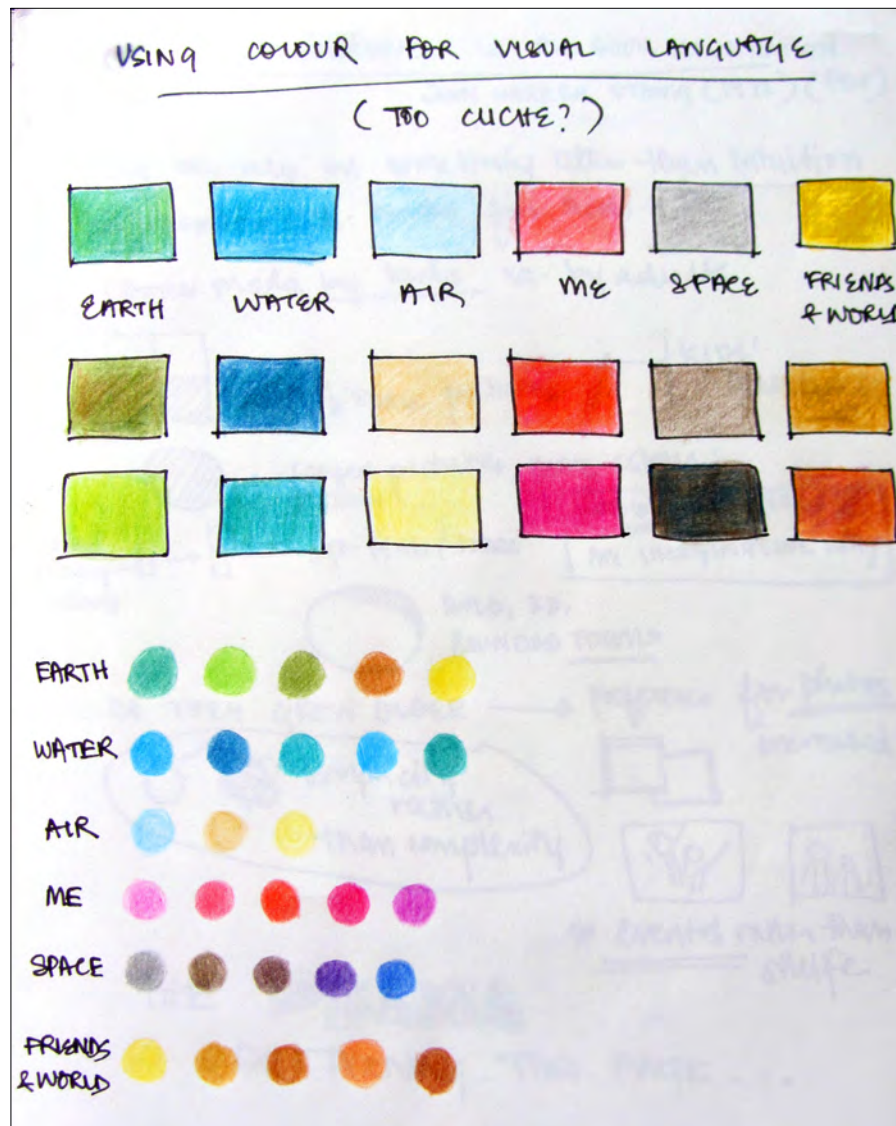
In the initial stage, and as a first interpretation of the poems, specific colour palettes were charted out for each.

Colour inspiration was also derived from images from the movie 'The Fall,' as well as from Tibetan prayer flags, which follow a specific colour scheme for the elements of earth, water, fire, air and sky/space.

"We need to teach children how to read visual compositions for meaning. Picture books present a perfect opportunity to introduce them to the language of visual composition and its power to inform."

– KATRIN ROBERTSON,
PBS PARENTS, PBS.ORG –





Learning from the Masters

ILLUSTRATION INSPIRATION

As part of building up a personal 'inspiration database' of illustrator's works, a large number of images from the field of children's illustrated books and picture books were collected.

These were eventually turned into an album of sorts, which would serve as an immediate inspiration folder and from which more ideas could be gleaned for taking the image-making process forward.

The book would also help to make a closer study on the distinct styles and techniques used by different illustrators.

Looking at how certain artists work has also helped get insights into their processes and methods. Process videos by illustrators Oliver Jeffers, Renata Liwska and Peter Brown revealed glimpses into the different ways in which they approach the craft of storytelling for children's book illustration.

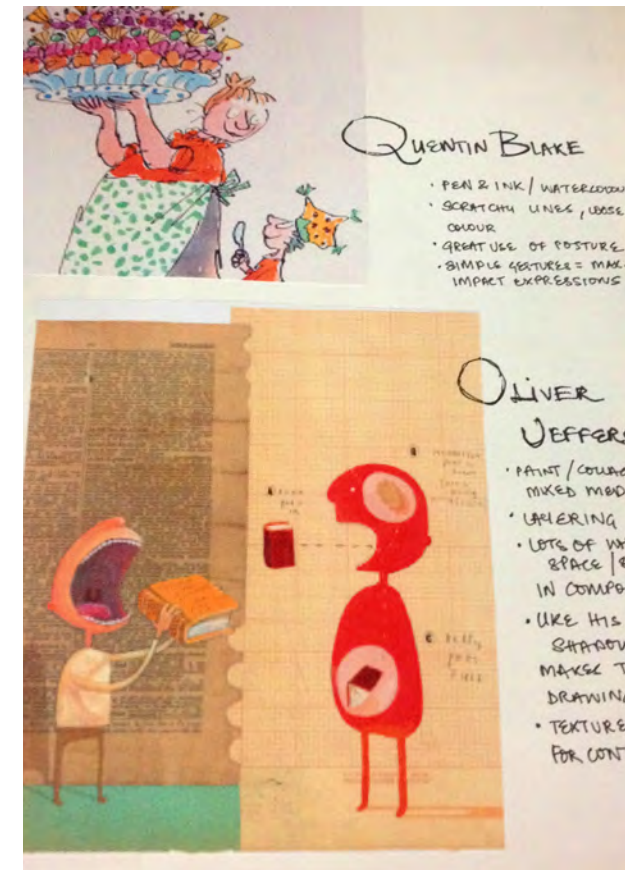


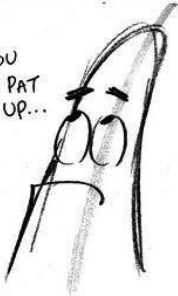
ILLUSTRATION INSPIRATION



PUSH YOUR POSES!

9

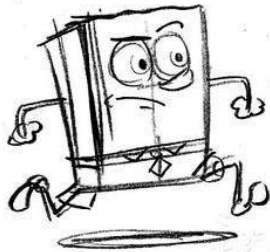
IF YOU
WANT PAT
TO LOOK UP...



...MAKE HIM
REALLY LOOK UP!



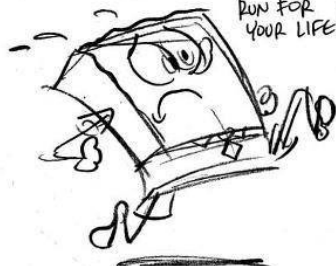
RUNNING



...ON A
MISSION



RUN FOR
YOUR LIFE!

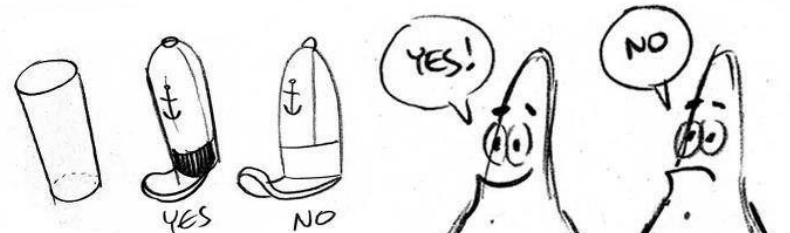


HOW FAR
CAN YOU
PUSH IT?

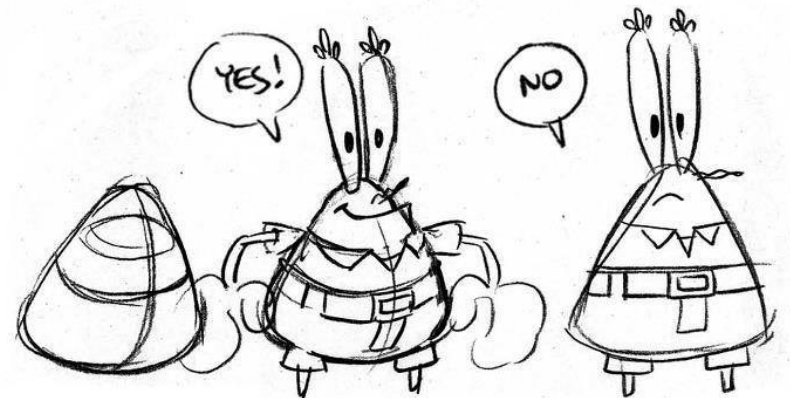
Words and Pictures by Sherm Cohen www.CartoonSNAP.com SpongeBob SquarePants created by Stephen Hillenburg. SpongeBob SquarePants: ©2008 Viacom International Inc. All Rights Reserved. Nickelodeon, SpongeBob SquarePants, and all related titles, logos and characters are trademarks of Viacom International Inc.

DRAW THROUGH TO EMPHASIZE ROUNDNESS & DEPTH

10



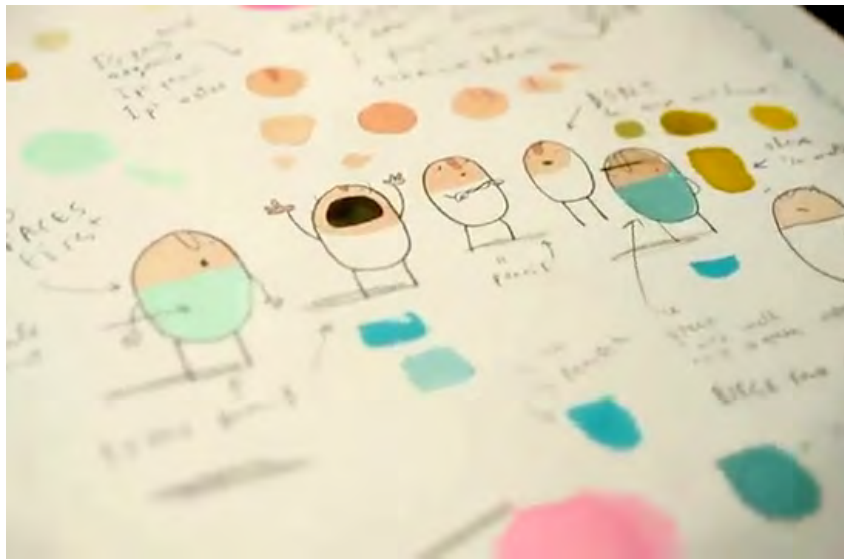
Think of what you're drawing as a real object that has weight, roundness and depth. When drawing rounded shapes, emphasize and exaggerate the curves. Use construction lines to trace the forms all the way around. It all helps your drawings pop out of the flat page or screen.



Words and Pictures by Sherm Cohen www.CartoonSNAP.com SpongeBob SquarePants created by Stephen Hillenburg. SpongeBob SquarePants: ©2008 Viacom International Inc. All Rights Reserved. Nickelodeon, SpongeBob SquarePants, and all related titles, logos and characters are trademarks of Viacom International Inc.

Facing Page: Character Design Tips & Tutorials, handout sheets from Cartoonsnap.com

This Page: (clockwise) Stills from process videos by illustrators Peter Brown, Renata Liwska, and Oliver Jeffers





A painted staircase at the KATHA Lab School

Moving Forward

REFINED OBJECTIVE & PROCESS

REVISIONS AND NEW VISIONS

- Refining the project objective
- Guide discussion: new perspectives
- Green inspiration: forest tales

FROM TEXT TO IMAGES

- Brainstorming and concept generation
- Keywords and moodboards
- Different mediums and treatments

JUMPING IN

- Nature activities for children
- Getting kids involved in image-making

Revisions and New Visions

REFINING THE PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Midway through the project, the first visit with my academic guide, Ajay Tiwari, was arranged. Having worked with Ajay on projects in the past, his mentoring was sought out because of the combination of his resources and guidance, which would add a lot of value to the project.

Following an update on the progress thus far, Ajay discussed my objectives for the project and what was intended for the illustrations. The worrying personal concern was not having a clearer, more structured approach to the whole process of the diploma project, but Ajay was reassuring in pointing out that intuitive insights could also help push the work forward.

After discussing the main idea of making the illustrations reflect the wonders of the world – and to somehow get a young audience excited about the natural world – we agreed that this was a key point to focus on through the project. It was decided that I should make the illustrations work towards

that goal of 'making the earth exciting' for young readers.

Ajay was also interested in the options put forth about using natural materials such as leaves, twigs and flowers to create illustrations, as well as photographs or collage for some of the other poems.

At the end of the meeting, he came up with a checklist of things to stay focused on:

- History: How form and content of children's picture books have evolved over the years
- Comparison: Inspiration from looking at other illustrated books on similar themes
- Narrative: My own take on the text, i.e., how I choose to interpret the poems
- Objective: Deciding what I want the images to say, and how to bring words and images together harmoniously

FOREST KINDERGARTENS

In the process of hunting for more 'green inspiration,' it was inspiring to come across a method of preschooling known as Forest Kindergartens. In this set-up, toddlers are encouraged to play and learn entirely outside a closed classroom setting, in woods and streams and other outdoor spaces.

The concept has gathered momentum in the last decade and is slowly gaining more acceptance from parents around the world. An approach like this that gets children involved with nature in a more direct and immediate way is truly amazing, as it also teaches them to value and respect the natural world.

A documentary about Marutanbo, a forest school in Japan, follows the children as they navigate the woods near the town and enjoy discovering things on their own, while the teachers take a backseat in the learning process.

Another short film is 'Into the Middle of Nowhere' by Anna Frances Ewert, which chronicles a similar forest kindergarten in Edinburgh, Scotland.



I can catch a praying mantis.



From Text to Images

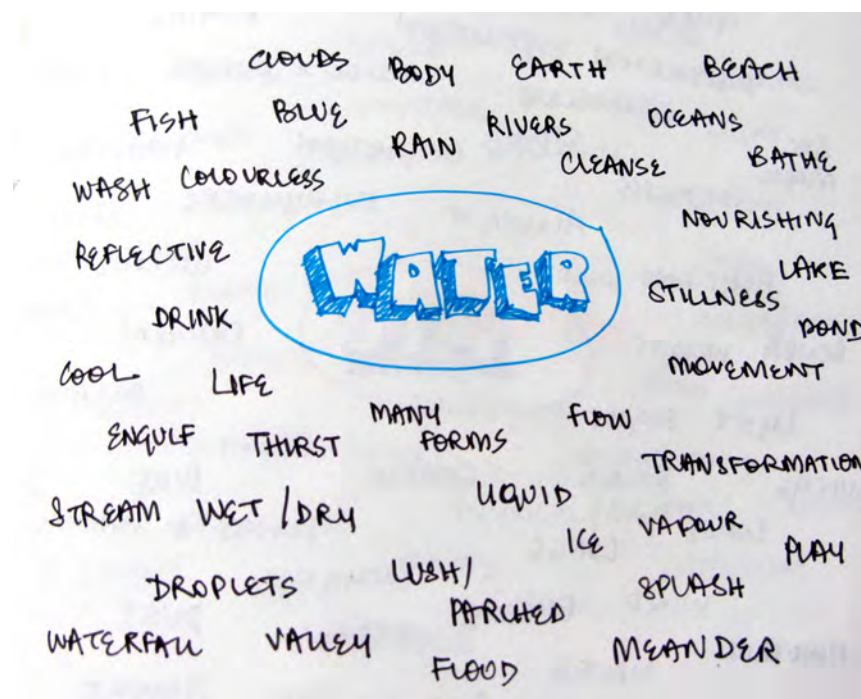
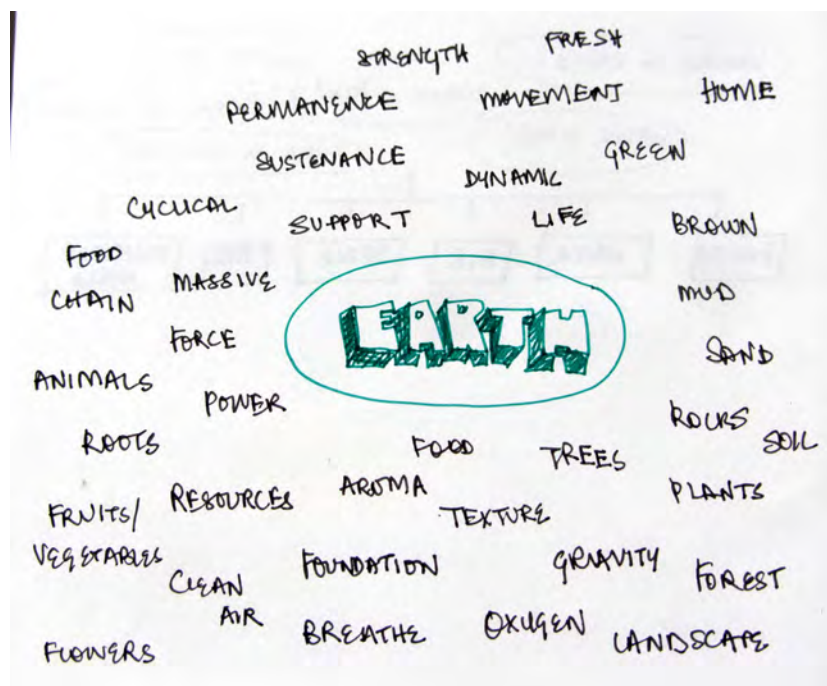
BRAINSTORMING & CONCEPT GENERATION

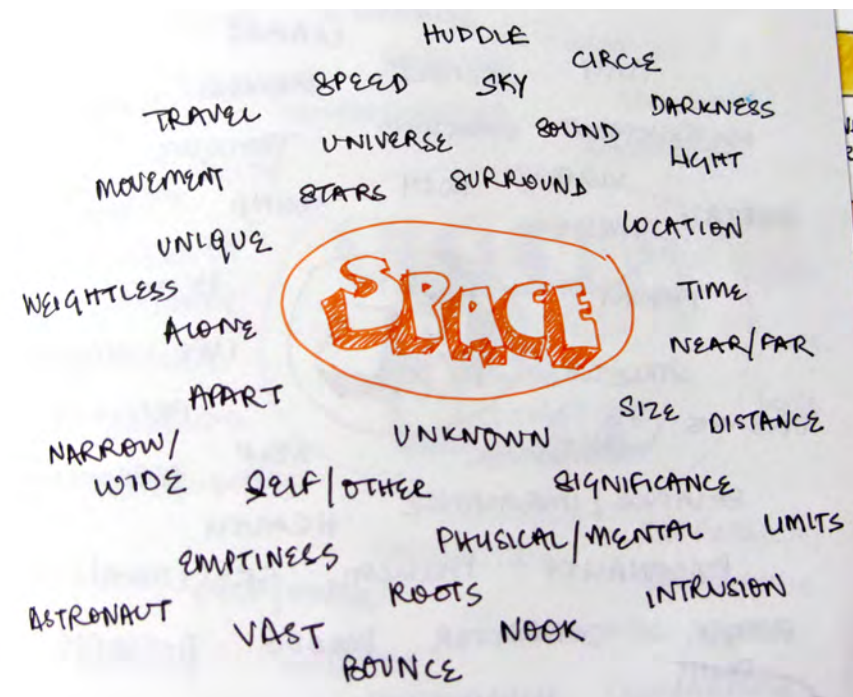
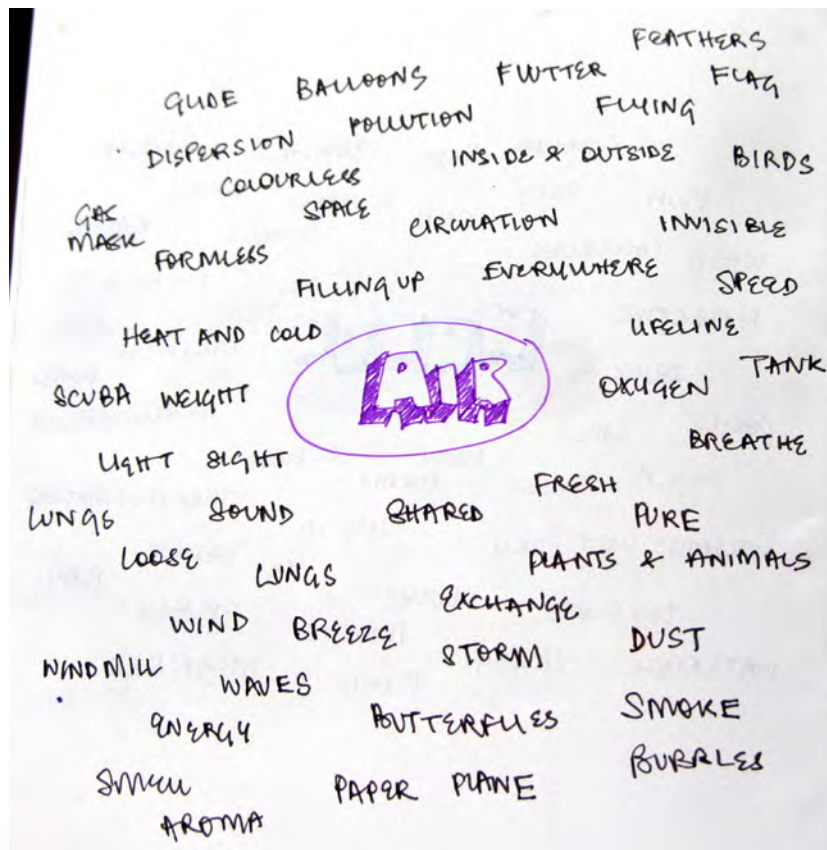
Following many re-readings of the poems in order to fully absorb the imagery and rhythm of the texts, the immediate responses were first charted out as associative words and visual metaphors.

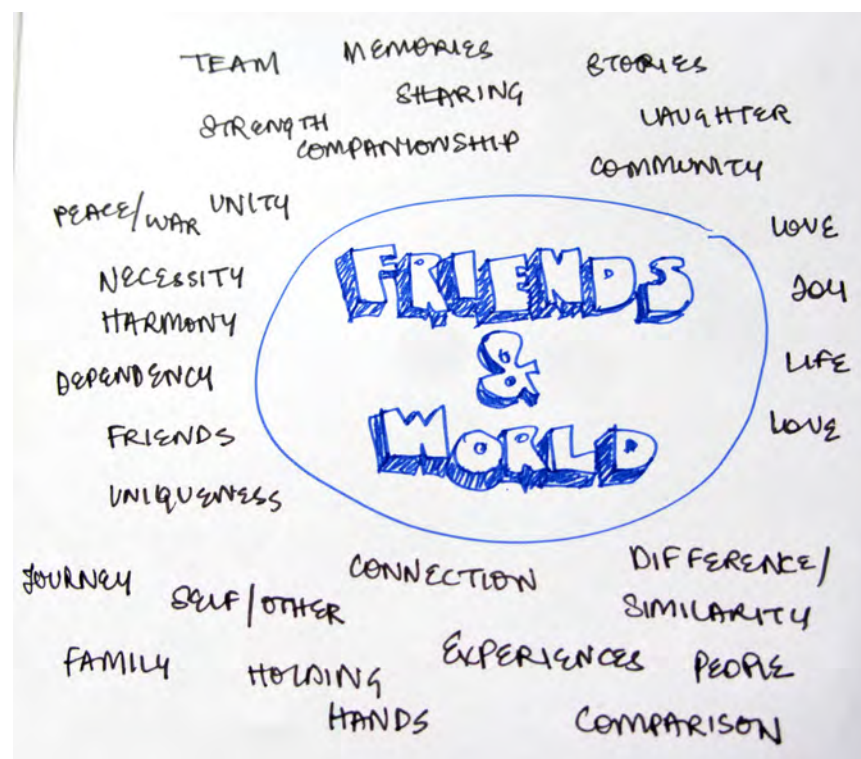
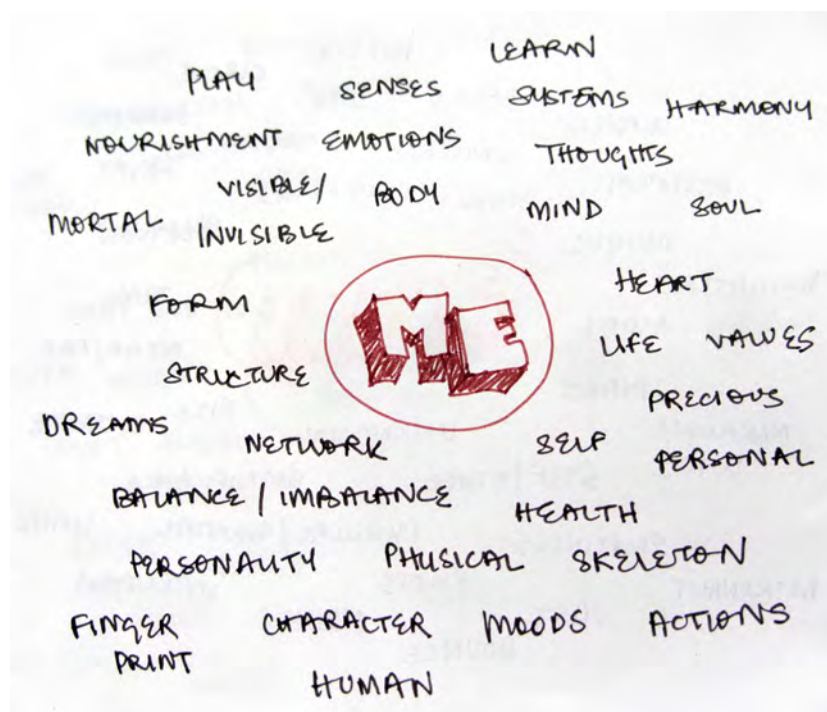
Various concepts and ideas associated with it were mapped out around the central theme of each poem. This free-flowing brainstorming greatly helped in generating new, divergent concepts, and to explore as many ideas as possible before arriving at something more specific.

Having several related and unrelated concepts mapped out together in this way also helped in developing new connections and ideas for visual metaphors which were not previously considered.

Based on the brainstorming charts, rough concepts for the illustrations began to come together. Further idea-mapping through moodboards also started to take ideas forward for the images.







Visual Mind-mapping

MOODBOARDS & CONNECTIONS

During a discussion with my faculty Immanuel Suresh, he suggested that making moodboards, or visual mind-maps, would help collate and process several associated ideas and concepts on the individual themes, and supplement the textual brainstorming process already carried out.

To generate the moodboards, images were grouped around the central theme, taking off from the words that came up during the previous brainstorming session. For example, for the 'Earth' theme, words such as 'fresh,' 'lush,' 'green,' 'sunshine,' and 'grow' were used to search for image references and make primary associations.

The moodboard process ended up being highly beneficial, as seeing all the visual references together on one board helped generate even more interesting visual metaphors and ideas for the illustrations.

WHERE IS EARTH?

Where is earth? asks Elephant, raising trunk to ear.

Where is earth? asks tiny Ant of the little deer.

Where is earth? asks big River, as she curves and turns.

Where is earth? asks shady Tree of the tiny ferns.

Where is earth? I don't know but I love it, says Hill,

I know that the earth keeps away the chill!

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet!

WATER IS ME!

I am deep and so big when I am the sea!

I rush over Deccan to Cherapungee.

I swoosh and I whoosh in deep Silent Valley,

I'm lake, stream, waterfall that love to dally.

I turn to glacier in chilly mountain air,

And cling to the fur of Himalayan bear

I love Rajasthan, but am rarely found there!

WHERE IS AIR?

Air is in whales that live in the sea,

It's in bees and in bugs

and smart little me.

Air is in monkeys that jump in the trees,

It's in roses and noses

that dance in the breeze.

Air is in camels that ride the desert sand,

In oceans and rivers

and mountains grand.

Air is in baby dogs that roam in the city,

In dewdrops and squirrels

and things not so pretty.

Air is in yaks that climb mighty peaks,

In glacier, frozen sea

and wet, rainy beaks.

I AM ME!

The Me I can see has mouth, ears and nose,

The Me I cannot see knows where are my toes.

The Me I can see has hands, legs and chin,

The Me I cannot see feels sad or makes me grin.

The Me I can see smiles back in the glass,

The Me I cannot see feels scared on the first day of class.

The Me I can see eats, sleeps and sings a song,

The Me I cannot see turns food to muscles strong.

The Me I can see falls down and cuts her knee,

The Me I cannot see makes the blood in me.

The Me I can see reads, writes and wins races,

The Me I cannot see remembers names and many faces.

The Me I can see draws a hot-air balloon,

The Me I cannot see dreams of flying to the moon.

The Me I can see pats snakes, cats and pups,

The Me I cannot see has love that fills me up!

HAPPY IN MY SPACE!

Elephant, baby-phant what do you see?

I see waterfalls dance with a bee.

Waterfall, waterfall, what do you hear?

I hear baby tigers play without fear.

My little striped tiger, what do you smell?

I smell earthworms, keeping earth well!

Earthworm, digging worm what do you taste?

I taste the hill and its earthy paste!

Baby hill, green hill what do you touch?

I feel your fingers and I like it so much!

I am happy, you are happy, what keeps us so?

It is having space to live. And friends
who make me glow!

WHO IS BETTER?

I am stronger than you, said the ant.

Just see how much I can carry.

I am bigger than you, said Rhino.

My size & shape are so scary!

I'm brighter than you, said Firefly.

See how I glow and I shimmer!

I'm bolder than you, said Hibiscus.

See how your rays make me glimmer

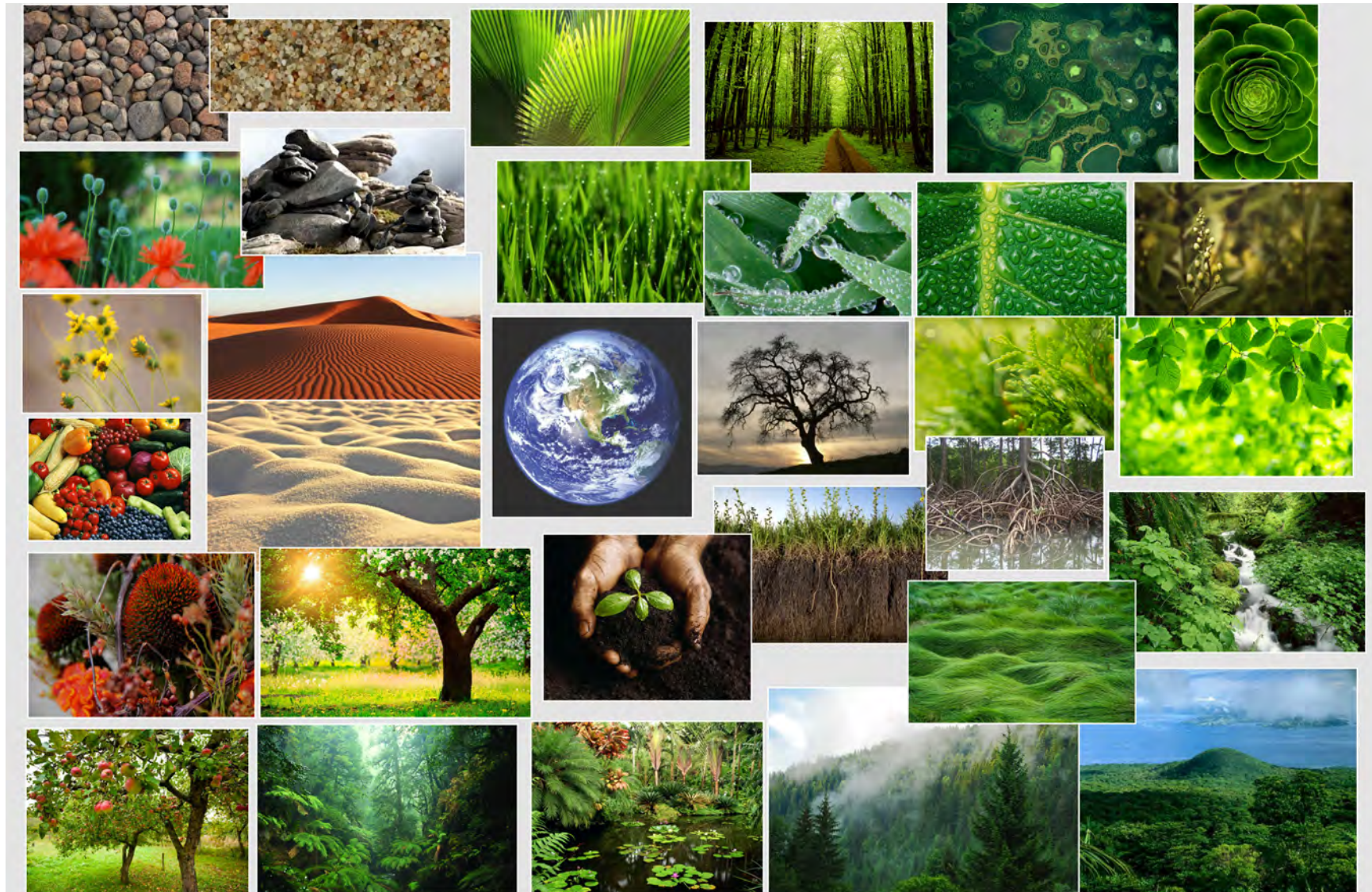
I am better than you, said the child.

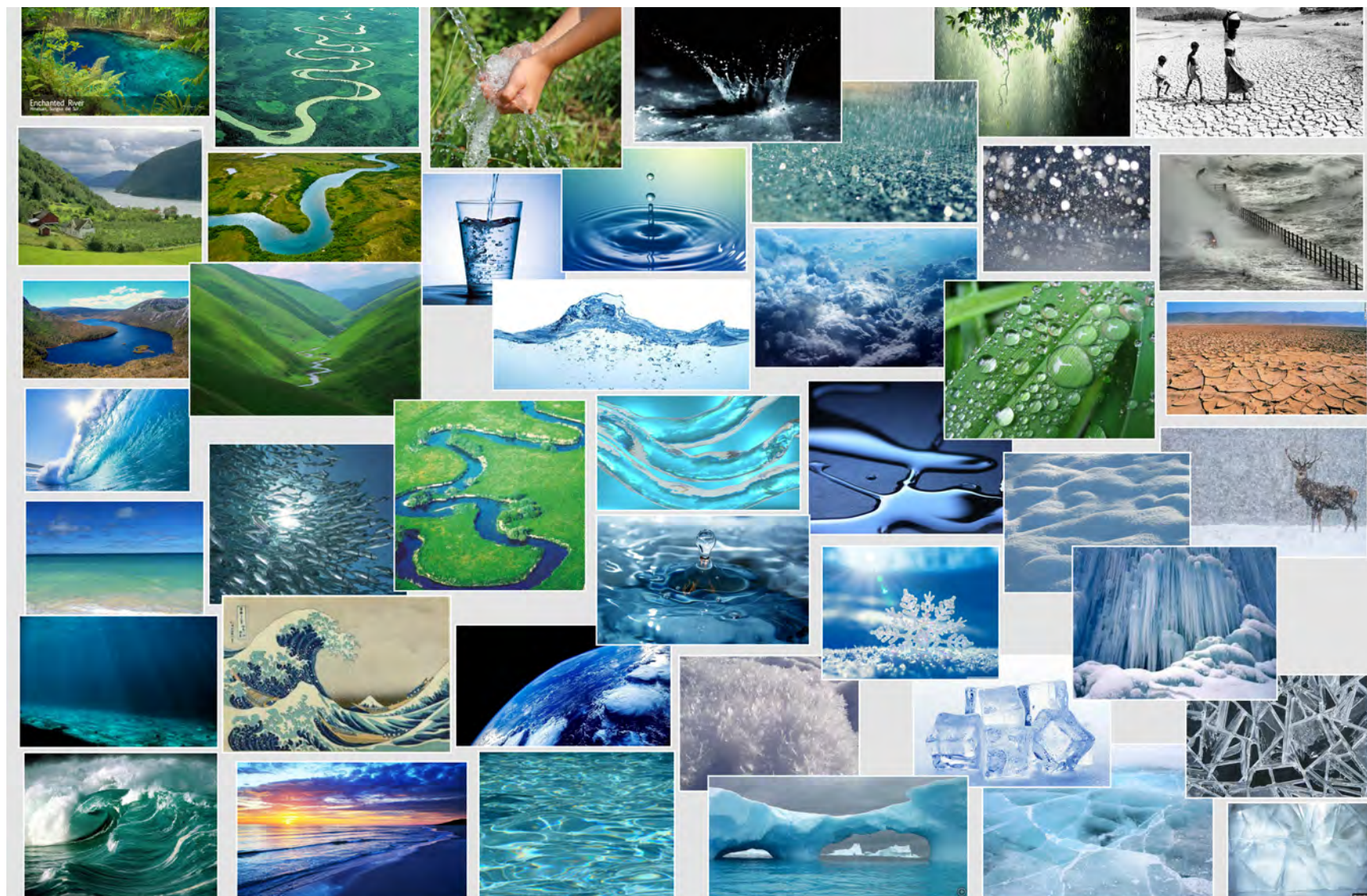
I make such nice art. I am fun!

No one's better or bigger than friends!

And we are that, aren't we?" smiled Sun.

'EARTH'





'AIR'



A dense collage of 30 small images arranged in a grid-like fashion. The images represent various themes: nature (rolling green hills, sunset, aurora borealis, forest, cave), space (astronauts, galaxies, Milky Way), human emotion (group hug, people in a circle, person in a crowd, person in a cave, person in a cave), and abstract concepts (hands forming a house, person in a cave, person in a cave, person in a cave). The images are of various sizes and are set against a black background.



Jumping In

NATURE ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

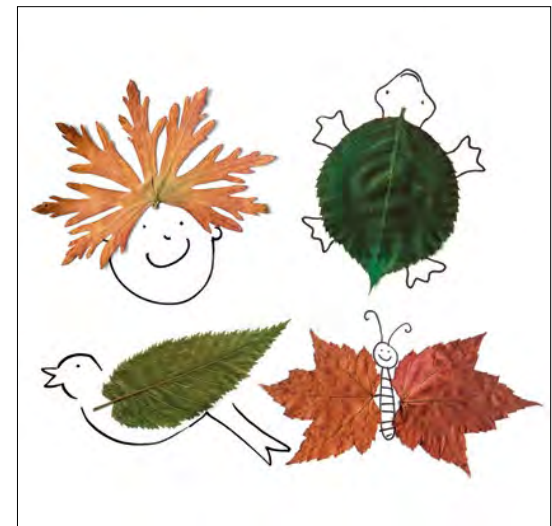
In order to explore some options for the treatments of the final illustrations, as well as for activities that would be inspired by the poems, inspiration images were collected from websites focussing on creative nature-based play and activities for toddlers and preschoolers.

A list of natural materials considered for use was drawn up:

Leaves, blades of grass, fruit/vegetable peel, flower petals, flower buds, tree bark, coconut husk, jute/hemp, cotton fibres, twigs, stones/rocks, sea shells, plant seeds, bird feathers, nut shells, pinecones, natural clay/terracotta, sand/mud, insect wings

Further explorations would be necessary to evaluate how these materials could be creatively incorporated into the illustrations and the activity spreads.

INSPIRATION FOR
NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES





Entrance to a classroom at the KATHA Lab School

Visiting KATHA

LEARNING PROGRAMMES & PUBLISHING

THE KATHA STORY

- Lab School: learning programmes
- Publishing history

STORYSHOP TREASURES

- KATHA's body of published work
- Resource archives
- Revising approach based on new ideas

PRESCHOOLER PROFILES

- A peep into a toddler's life
- Questionnaire for parents

The KATHA Story

EDUCATION & PUBLISHING HISTORY

Two months into the project, the opportunity to make a trip to Delhi presented itself, and a visit to the Katha office and the Katha Lab School in the slums of Govindpuri was planned.

The visit offered a chance to get a firsthand idea of the teaching methods Katha employs in its school, as well as using stories and activities in the unique curriculum.

The Katha Lab School is a bright and colourful campus, nestled in the bustling Govindpuri slums and full of spacious classrooms and labs, peppered with vibrant murals and paintings done by the children.

As it was a few weeks before the reopening of the school, it was a missed opportunity to interact with the children. However, we were able to meet volunteers and teachers who were preparing lesson plans.

Katha's Lab School, set up in 1990, has developed teaching programmes that

incorporate story books and non-textbook based lessons into the learning method.

Classes are conducted by grouping children according to their ages and learning capabilities. The lessons are focused on getting the kids involved in activities and story-based learning from an early age.

The school has also developed the 'I Love Reading' programme, which trains teachers in the Katha method and then disseminates this to schools under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) across the city.

When it was time to leave, it was with a feeling of joy and gratitude for being able to contribute in a small way to Katha's efforts.

It was great to see the children in the slum learn in such an exciting and positive environment. Tremendous opportunities are being created here by a community held together with enthusiasm and commitment.

Colourful scenes from the Katha Lab School in New Delhi





Teacher trainees and volunteers preparing activities and lesson plans at the school



Storyshop Treasures

PUBLISHED WORK & RESOURCES

As part of the visit to Katha, there was also the chance to explore their 'Storyshop,' a bookshop within the main office. Apart from housing Katha's growing range of picture books and children's literature, it also has a great collection of resource books on early learning and teaching methods.

A couple of afternoons were spent drawing inspiration from Katha's body of published work, looking at the different illustrative styles in the picture books. They led to more considerations about experimenting with new and innovative materials.

The resource archives had many useful references on early learning and art activities for preschoolers. Some of the books offered new insights which were eventually used to revise the approach to the illustrations and generate new concepts.

LEARNING THROUGH ART by Jane and Roshan Sahi looks at how art is perceived by toddlers and young children, and offers

ideas for activities involving creative techniques and materials.

The book explains how children between the ages of 2 and 6 discover visual language primarily through dots, lines, dashes and spirals. More importantly, visual language for young children is both a means of expression and a tool for communication.

These observations offered new ideas about playing around with space, composition, and abstraction in the illustrations, keeping in mind that preschoolers have a keen sense of visual forms from an early age.



Glimpses of the reading room and resource section at the Katha Storyshop







Preschooler Profiles

A PEEP INTO A TODDLER'S LIFE

In order to get a better sense of the intended audience for the project, it was decided to make an enquiry into what engages children of the target age-group.

A short set of questions was prepared for parents of preschoolers and toddlers:

1. When you go shopping for your child, what sort of books do you pick up? Any specific character-driven series that they enjoy, or some particular types of pictures (for example: big bold pictures or simple ones? Certain colours, animals, rhymes, etc.,)?
2. Do they have any favourite books/toys/activities/shows that they keep going back to?
3. Do they do a lot of outdoor activities and arts-and-crafts? Are they aware of nature and the living earth, and interact with it in any way (outdoor games, interaction with natural materials, etc.,)?
4. Does the pre-school/play-school that your child go to have any interesting

activities that encourage involvement and interaction with nature and natural materials? Are they aware of earth, plants and animals, and other living things around them?

5. What gets preschoolers excited about these topics of earth and nature, and how aware are they of these things at this young age?
6. What visual images do you use to get them happy and engaged (books, TV shows, mobile/tab apps, games, toys, activities, etc.,)?

The questions helped build profiles of two preschoolers: Aanya Purkayastha (4 years old) from Vishakapatnam, and Mehar Kalsi (5 years old) from Mumbai.

Collecting the parents' responses offered more clarity on what appeals to children of this age-group, and what approaches would be best suited in adapting the illustrations to their appeal.

AANYA PURKAYASTHA, 4 YEARS OLD
VISHAKAPATNAM

(RESPONSES FROM HER MOTHER DIYA)

Aanya loves her books. She likes bold pictures and since she still can't read herself, she likes it when I rhyme. She's extremely fond of this touchy-feely book on dogs. It also has levers that make the dogs do some action (eg: scratch or shake).

Kids her age can see pictures and make up their own version too. She tries this sometimes.

As for craft activities she has just started pasting and tearing and using colours. Since their attention span is very short, its best to keep information concise.

We go to the playground every day. So her outdoor activities include climbing and running and jumping. She observes flowers and their colours and different heights of trees. She (and all kids her age) love to play with sand. So we carry sand toys even to the playground.

MEHAR KALSI, 5 YEARS OLD
MUMBAI

(RESPONSES FROM HER MOTHER JASMIN)

The books that teachers recommend for the kids are mostly moral story books. An example of a book that Mehar has is 'Amrita and the Trees', which teaches kids the value of trees and preserving them.

Mehar's favourite books are Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the Noddy series and the Barbie series of books. She loves puzzles and cycling, and her favourite show on TV is Chota Bheem.

On family visits to Umbergaon in Gujarat, she likes playing with stones, and when at the beach, she likes playing with sand.

The kids in Mehar's school go on field trips to places like farms, where teachers tell them about the cows giving milk and remind them of moral stories. The kids also enjoy watching the trees and plants along the way during these trips.



Giving Form to Ideas

DESIGN AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

FIRST EXPLORATIONS

- Text-image association
- Thumbnails and concept development

TAKING SHAPE

- Gathering reference
- Refining concepts
- Considering treatment options

BUILDING A WORLD

- Characters: unifying element for series
- World-building: keywords and inspiration
- Style inspiration: naive and folk art

First Explorations

ROUGH IDEAS & CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Arriving at a stage in the project with a better understanding of the background and context, it was time to begin fleshing out rough ideas and developing the concepts for the illustrations.

Using the pagination and layout dummy provided by Katha as a guide, the text was split across the first six spreads for each of the books. With a total of 24 pages in 12 spreads, the books would also include activity sheets based on the poems, as well as a large double spread, fold-out poster in the centre.

The poems were broken up into couplets in order to accommodate them within the layout, and also keeping in mind the rhythm of the verses. Some of the poems were longer than the others and required a bit of tweaking to arrive at an agreeable layout.

The first rough thumbnails were pencil sketches based on immediate interpretations of the poems.

After the rough sketches were done, some more explorations were considered:

- Can the images be allowed to expand and breathe in a lot of white space?
- Can the images be simplified to basic forms? (eg: group of circles = trees?)
- Can the compositions be played with, using objects coming into the picture frame and/or walking out of it?

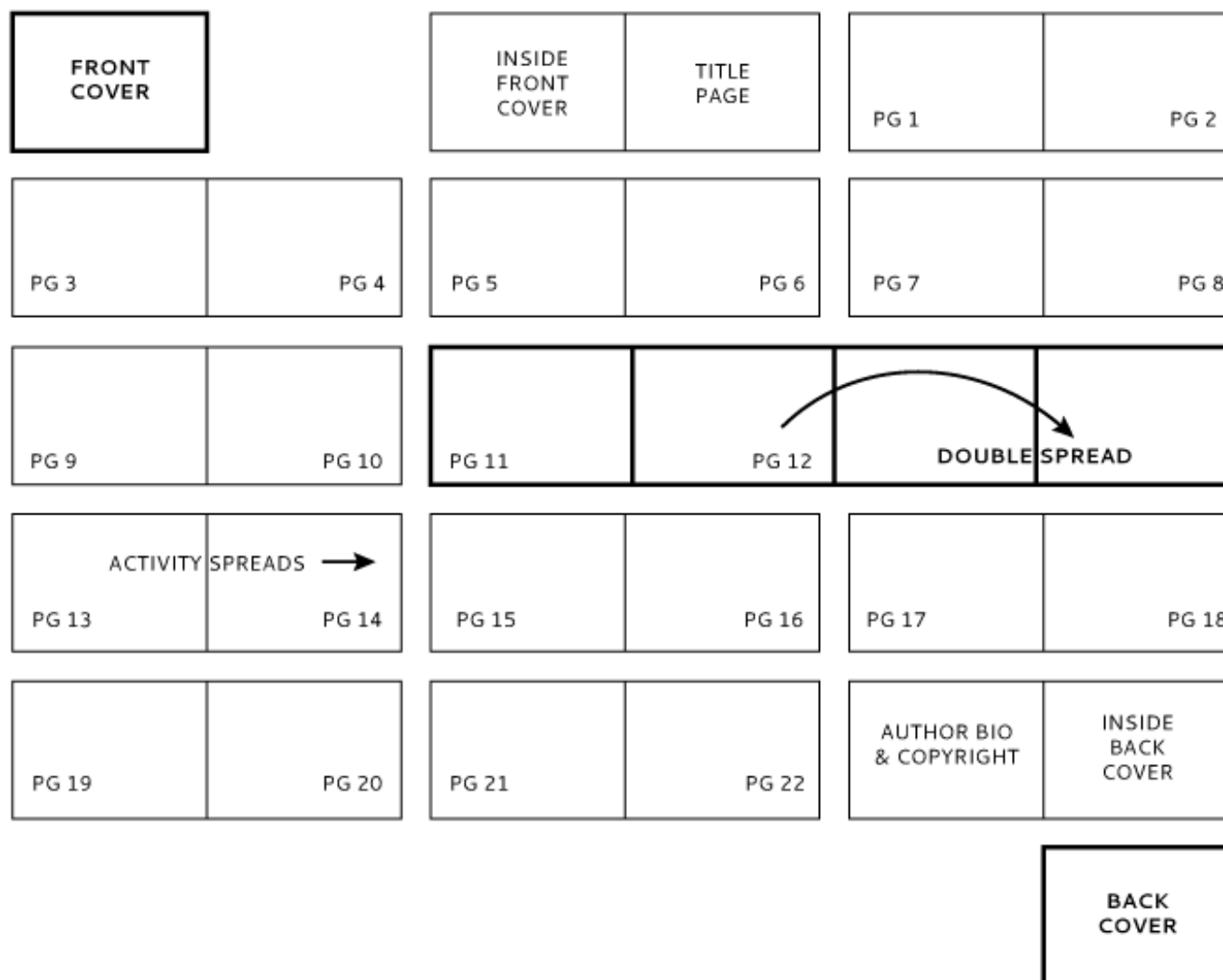
LAYOUT SPECIFICATIONS

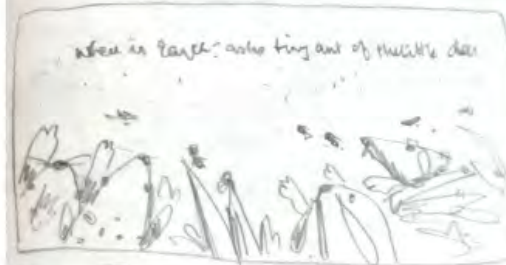
SIZE: 11 in. x 8.5 in. (A4 LANDSCAPE)

DOUBLE SPREAD: 44.5 in. X 8.5 in.

PAGE BLEED: 0.25 in.

24 PAGES + COVERS

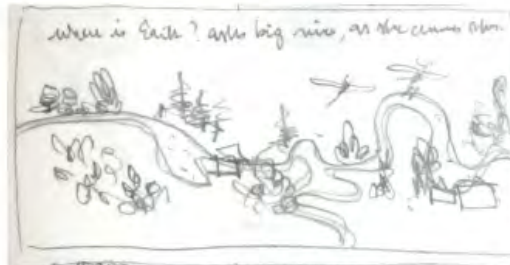




01 WHERE IS EARTH?

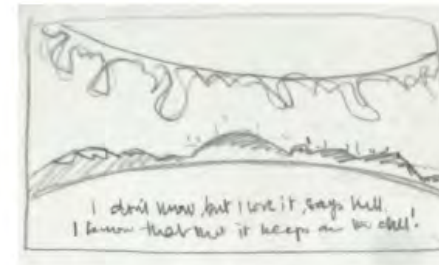
Where is earth? asks Elephant, raising trunk to ear.
(big animals peering down to the ground)

Where is earth? asks tiny Ant of the little deer.
(small animals looking up from the grass)



Where is earth? asks big River, as she curves and turns.
(view of a meandering river flowing through landscape)

Where is earth? asks shady Tree of the tiny ferns.
(view of jungle with thick tree cover and undergrowth)



Where is earth? I don't know but I love it, says Hill,
I know that the earth keeps away the chill!
(hills basking under the sun's warm glow)

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet!
(children & animals playing on earth, sun & moon in background)



02 WATER IS ME!

I am deep and so big when I am the sea!
(underwater view of ocean with fishes, creatures, waves)

I rush over Deccan to Cherapungee.
(bird's eye view of green plains with fields, rivers)



I swoosh and I whoosh in deep Silent Valley,
(cross section of deep valley with water splashing through)

I'm lake, stream, waterfall that love to dally.
(waterfalls cascading into a big pool/lake)



I turn to glacier in chilly mountain air,
And cling to the fur of Himalayan bear
(yaks and bear on snowy mountain, snowflakes falling)

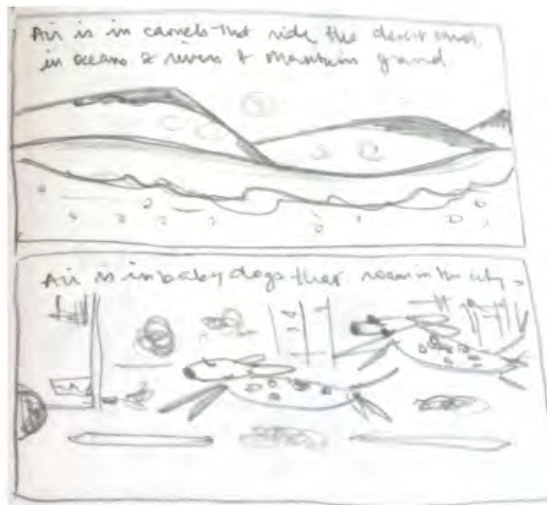
I love Rajasthan, but am rarely found there!
(camels in sunset desert, sloping towards ocean waters)



03 WHERE IS AIR?

Air is in whales that live in the sea,
It's in bees and in bugs and smart little me.
(child breathing in air on seashore as whales dance in sea)

Air is in monkeys that jump in the trees,
It's in roses and noses that dance in the breeze.
(people - and monkey - smelling roses in a breezy garden)



Air is in camels that ride the desert sand,
In oceans and rivers and mountains grand.
(view of desert rising up against blue waters of sea)

Air is in baby dogs that roam in the city,
(puppies running through a busy road with vehicles)



In dewdrops and squirrels and things not so pretty.
(a squirrel sitting next to its poop on a fresh morning)

Air is in yaks that climb mighty peaks,
In glacier, frozen sea and wet, rainy beaks.
(yaks grazing on high mountains with birds on their backs)



04 I AM ME!

The Me I can see has mouth, ears and nose,
 The Me I cannot see knows where are my toes.
 The Me I can see has hands, legs and chin,
 The Me I cannot see feels sad or makes me grin.
 The Me I can see smiles back in the glass,
 The Me I cannot see feels scared on the first day of class.

The Me I can see eats, sleeps and sings a song,
 The Me I cannot see turns food to muscles strong.
 The Me I can see falls down and cuts her knee,
 The Me I cannot see makes the blood in me.
 The Me I can see reads, writes and wins races,
 The Me I cannot see remembers names and many faces.

The Me I can see draws a hot-air balloon,
 The Me I cannot see dreams of flying to the moon.
 The Me I can see pats snakes, cats and pups,
 The Me I cannot see has love that fills me up!



05 HAPPY IN MY SPACE!

Elephant, baby-phant what do you see?
I see waterfalls dance with a bee.
Waterfall, waterfall, what do you hear?
I hear baby tigers play without fear.

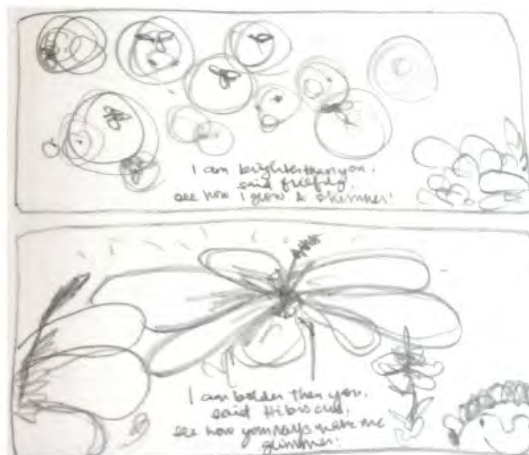
My little striped tiger, what do you smell?
I smell earthworms, keeping earth well!
Earthworm, digging worm what do you taste?
I taste the hill and its earthy paste!

Baby hill, green hill what do you touch?
I feel your fingers and I like it so much!
I am happy, you are happy, what keeps us so?
It is having space to live. And friends who make me glow!



06 WHO IS BETTER?

I am stronger than you, said the ant.
Just see how much I can carry.
I am bigger than you, said Rhino.
My size & shape are so scary!



I'm brighter than you, said Firefly.
See how I glow and I shimmer!
I'm bolder than you, said Hibiscus.
See how your rays make me glimmer!



I am better than you, said the child.
I make such nice art. I am fun!
No one's better or bigger than friends!
And we are that, aren't we?" smiled Sun.

Taking Shape

REFERENCE & REFINING CONCEPTS

After the initial thumbnail roughs were made, further explorations were taken up based on reference from new perspectives.

One idea that emerged from absorbing Dan Chiras' concept of the 'micro world' was to try and imagine what the natural world would look like from a child's point of view.

The child's eye view sees the world as grand and massive, from ground level up. Everything appears magnified and larger than life, pulsing with life and energy.

This unique child's eye view was referenced through images of the world seen from ground level. This perspective gave a new direction to the illustrations, with attempts being made to create compositions showing children in close contact with nature, viewing it as larger than life.

More reference was taken in the form of images of children playing and exploring, in order to understand and capture the

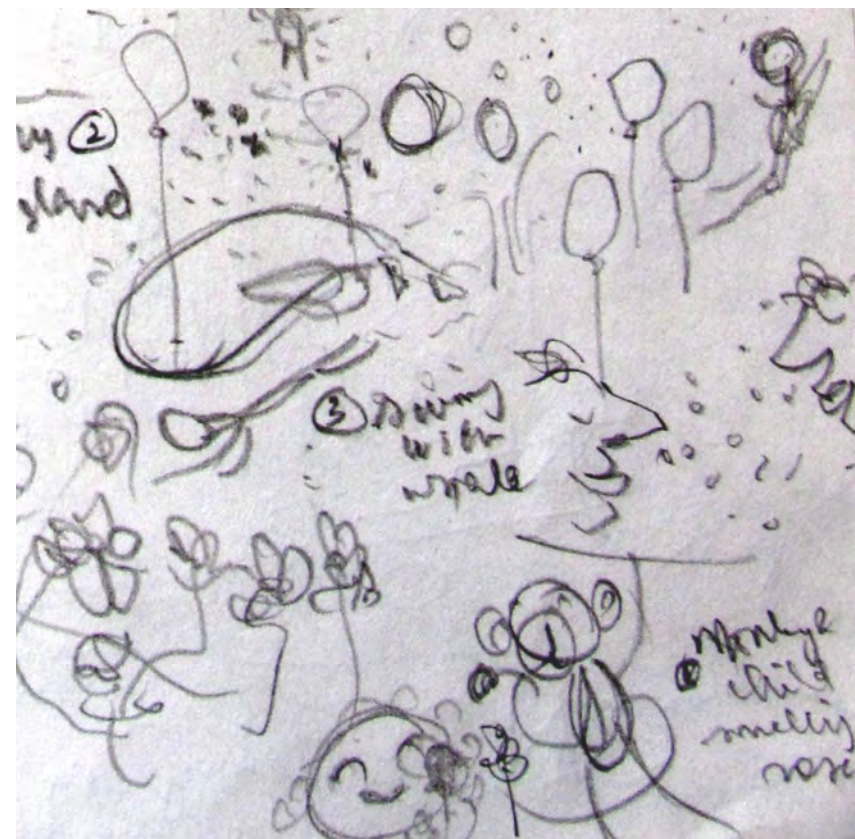
spontaneity and verve with which they navigate their surroundings.

Images of animals and nature from the National Geographic Magazine's archive provided additional inspiration for developing the concepts, including adding details and quirks to give richness and authenticity to the illustrations.

DIGITAL SKETCHES OF CONCEPTS >



CONCEPT REFINEMENT: PENCIL SKETCHES



REFERENCE IMAGES
OF CHILDREN
PLAYING &
EXPLORING





CHILD'S EYE
VIEW
<

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
REFERENCE
IMAGES
>





Building a World

CHARACTERS, STYLE & ENVIRONMENT

World-building refers to the process of constructing an imaginary world, populated with its own environments and characters. In the context of the project, it was crucial to build up the illustrations with enough detail and richness to lend them authenticity and realism.

It was evident that the illustrations for the poems would not necessarily have to be rendered in a realistic style to show realism: the 'realism' of the world could come from how authentically its elements blended together to present a holistic, aesthetically appealing image. This could also be achieved with highly stylized or abstracted treatments for the illustrations.

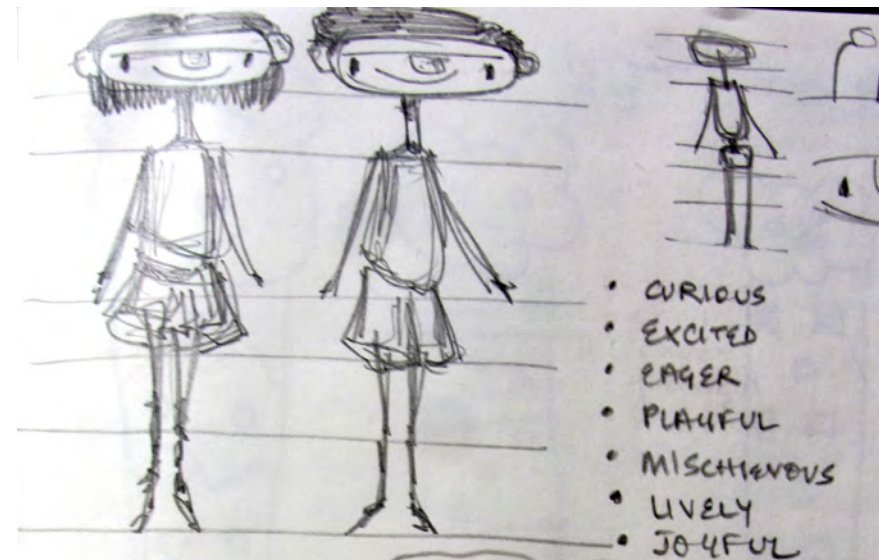
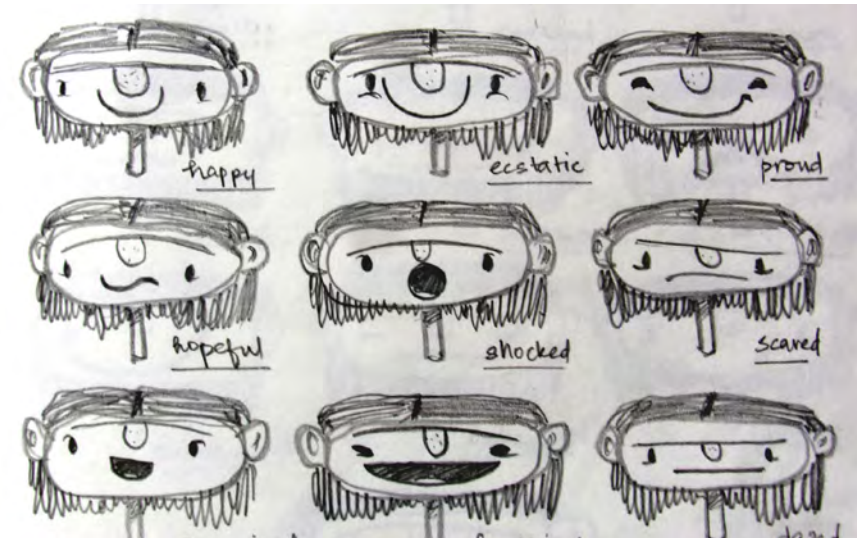
A few keywords were chosen to focus upon while developing the concepts; it was decided that the world of the illustrations would have to be 'alive,' 'atmospheric,' 'rich,' 'colourful,' and 'magical.' As inspiration for the feel and style of the world to be created, reference was taken from examples

of Naive and Folk Art, which rely on simplicity, pattern and vibrancy to give a sense of place and atmosphere. The works of artists like Henri Rousseau and Mary Blair were the prime focus.

Further inspiration was taken from concept art paintings and production design sketches of Disney and Pixar animation films, which effectively use colour to convey mood and build realism in fictional worlds.

The inclusion of a pair of characters, a boy and girl, was also considered as a visual language element to unify the series, and also to introduce a touch of mischief and play into the poems. These characters would guide the reader through the poems with their presence in each frame.

With all this in mind, a couple of sets of approaches were developed for the poems, with emphasis placed on dramatic compositions and quirky details.

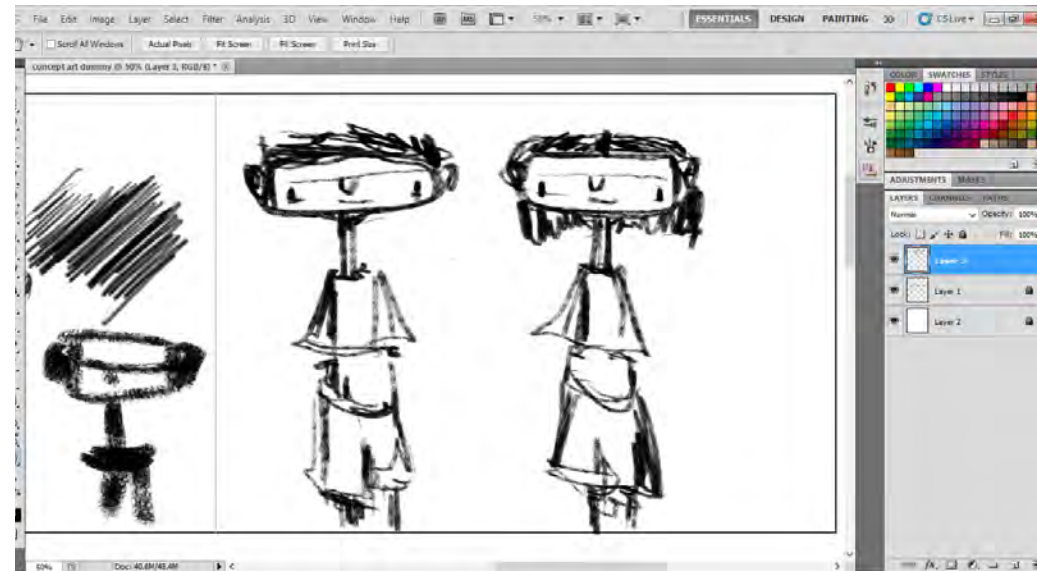


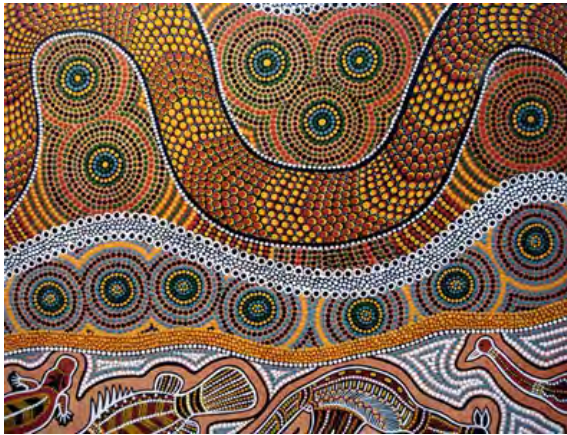


CHARACTER DESIGN EXPLORATIONS

THIS WORLD
NEEDS TO BE:

- ALIVE
- ATMOSPHERIC
- RICH
- COLOURFUL
- MAGICAL





STYLE INSPIRATION: NAIVE & FOLK ART

(Anti-clockwise) Australian Aboriginal Art, Arman Manookian, Mary Blair



(Clockwise) Margaret Loxton, Ivan Rabuzin, Henri Rousseau



EARTH: APPROACH 1



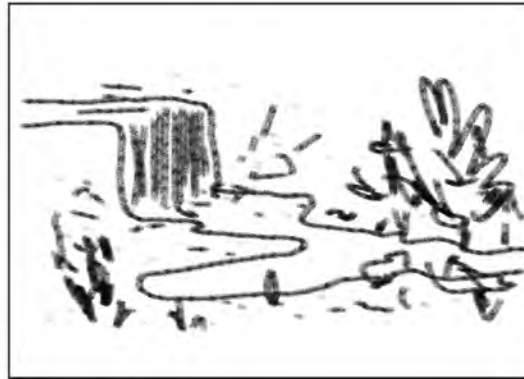
EARTH: APPROACH 2

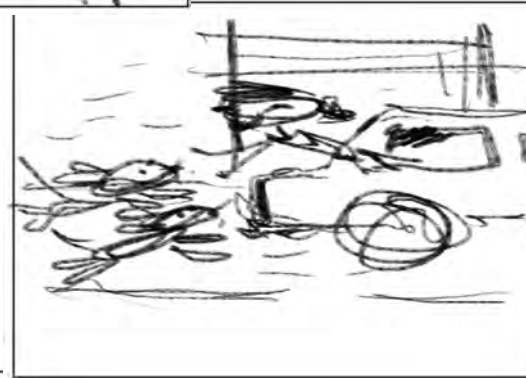


WATER: APPROACH 1

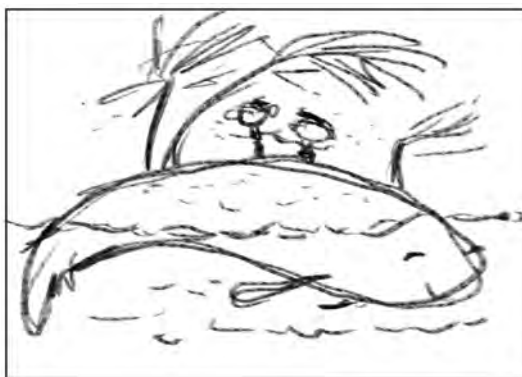


WATER: APPROACH 2





AIR: APPROACH 2





Making the Connection

STREAMLINING & FINALIZING IDEAS

NARROWING IT DOWN

- Refining style and compositions
- Book design: covers, layout, fonts

WAYS OF SEEING

- Style and treatment explorations
- Finalizing treatments

COMING TOGETHER

- Final prototypes
- Feedback and moving forward

Narrowing it Down

REFINING STYLE & COMPOSITIONS

After the first round of concept explorations, it was decided that revisiting the content would offer a fresh look at the themes of the poems, and the opportunity to consider whether they could be bettered or differently interpreted through new styles and treatments.

Digital style explorations using approximations of gouache paint, oil pastels and charcoal mediums were experimented with, to narrow down a suitable line quality and feel for the style in which the final illustrations would be done.

The concepts from the first round were refined further and illustrated within the layouts and font placements to check their compositional value.

These concepts also included the characters of a little boy and girl to give the images a boost of energy and warmth. A cartoony brush style was used for these explorations. Laying out the illustrations along with their

corresponding texts also helped check the rhythm and flow of the poems across the pages of each book.

A few colour treatments were also explored to decide on colour palettes and moods for each of the environments in the poems.



GOUACHE BRUSH (DIGITAL)

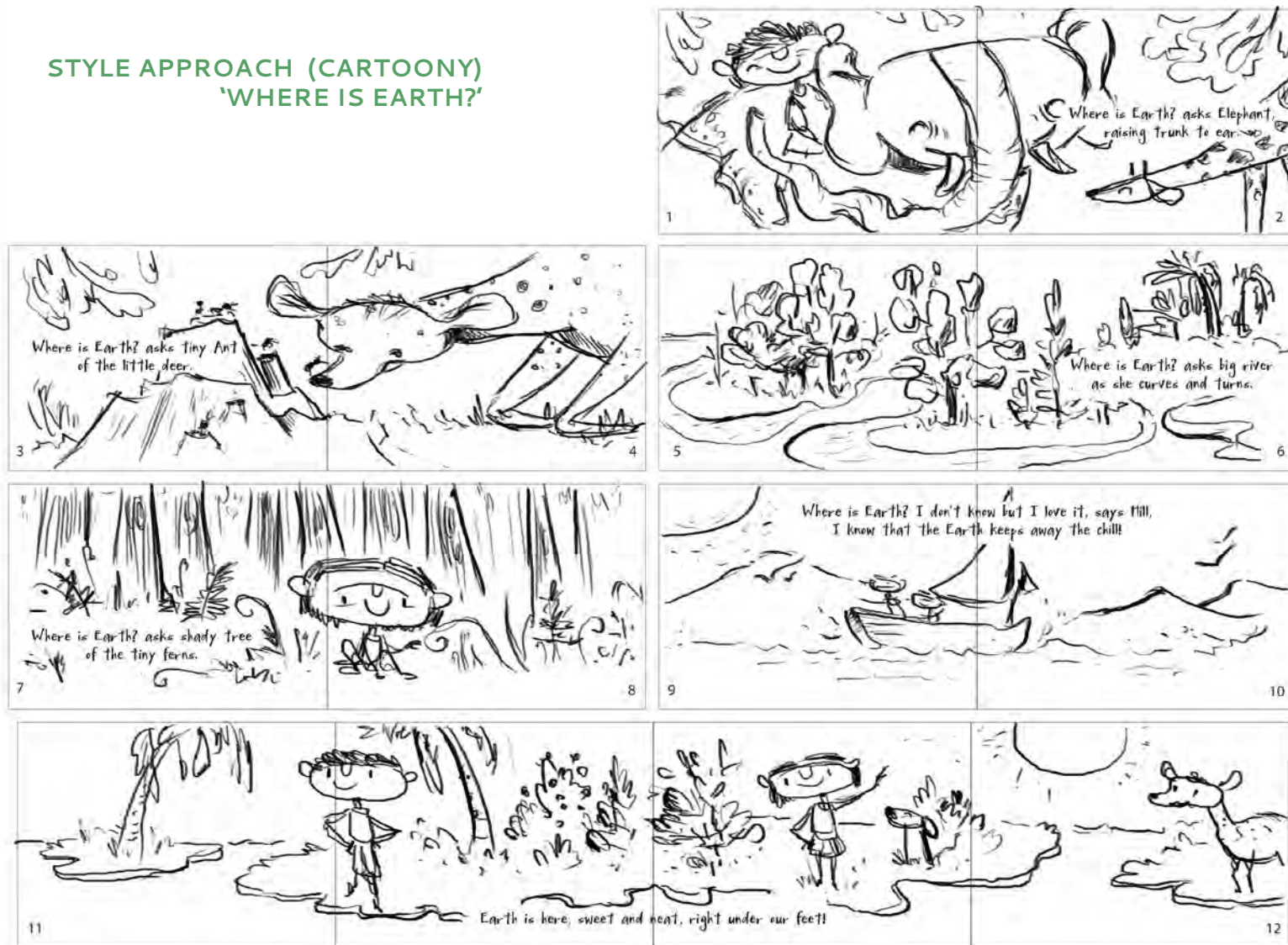


< OIL PASTEL
(DIGITAL)

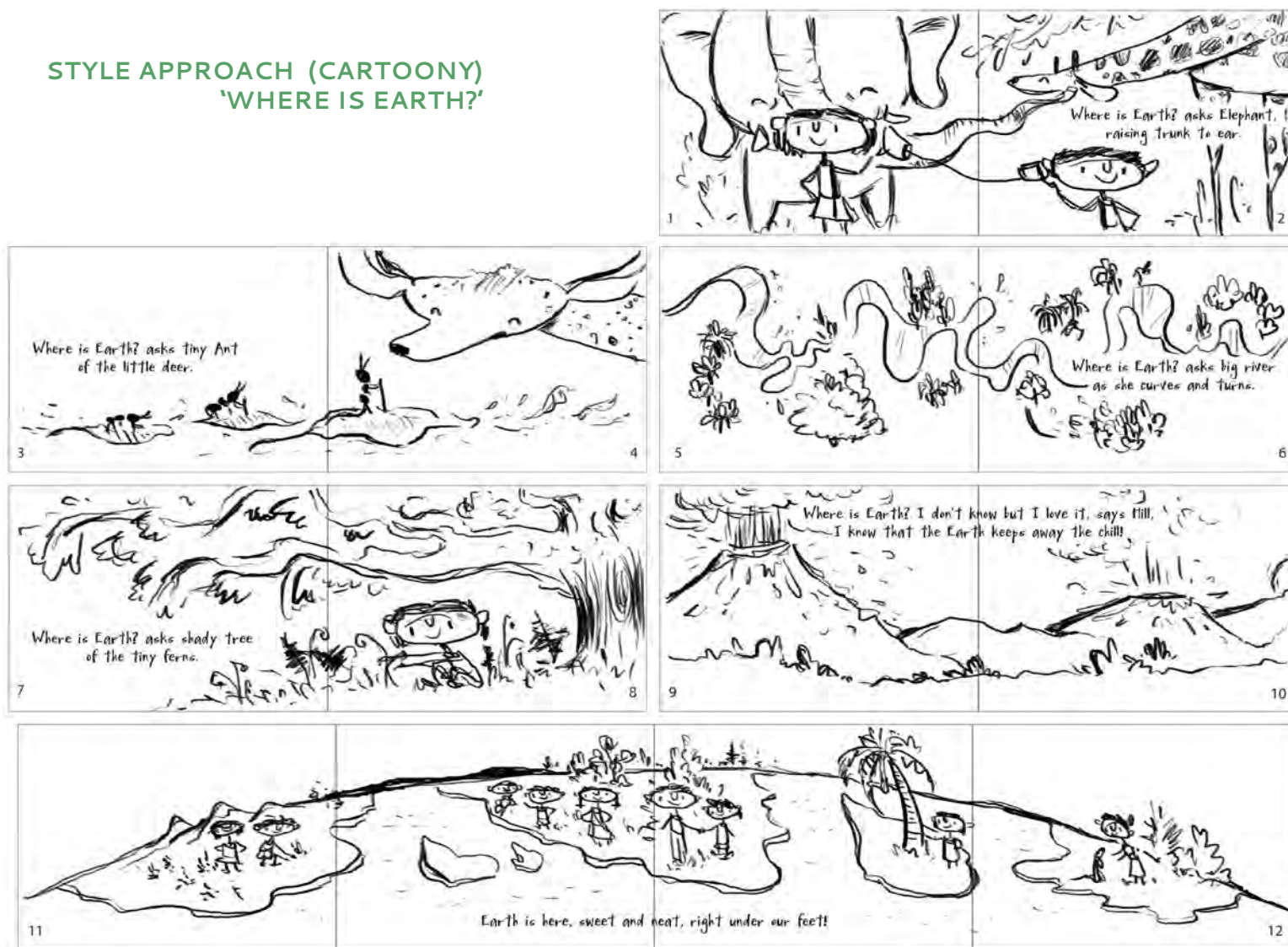
CHARCOAL
(DIGITAL) >



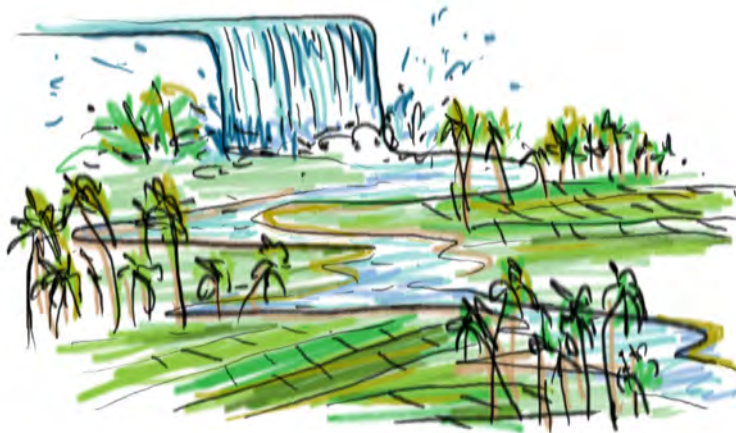
STYLE APPROACH (CARTOONY)
'WHERE IS EARTH?'



STYLE APPROACH (CARTOONY) 'WHERE IS EARTH?'







The Big Picture

BOOK DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Alongside the illustrations being developed, the overall book design was also built upon to consider how each whole book would come together with the layouts, covers, endpapers and fonts.

The book as a physical object for a child to hold and read, as well as for an adult to retrieve and read to the child, was a vital aspect to keep in mind while going about designing the overall look of the books.

The covers and endpapers would have to be eye-catching, bright and attractive for the toddler to be drawn to the world of the book, as well be able to effectively convey the idea of the book's contents in one sweeping glance.

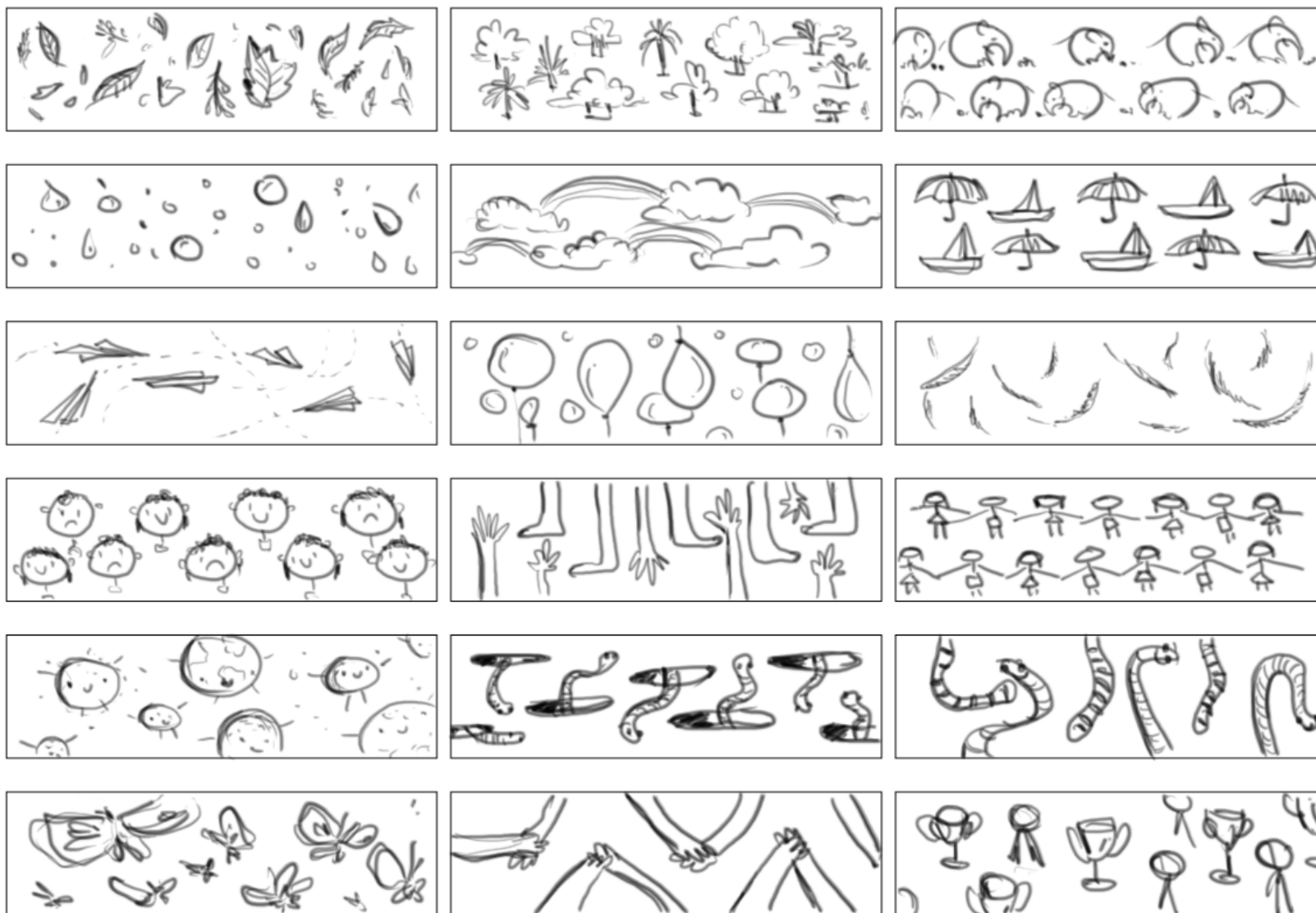
A few rough sketches of concepts for endpapers were made, keeping in mind that the endpapers – which form the inside of the front and back covers of the book – would help in carrying the theme through and across the flow of the poems, as well

playing the primary role of preparing the reader for what is to come.

The concepts offer a glimpse of certain focal elements from each theme (for example, trees and leaves for 'Where is Earth?', paper planes and feathers for 'Where is Air?') arranged in interesting and varied patterns.

Typeface and font considerations for the series were narrowed down based on conditions that the font should be legible and age-specific for the early reader audience, as well conveying a warmth and humane feeling to the themes. Handwritten fonts were considered for the titles and the body text for these reasons.

**ENDPAPER OPTIONS
(THREE FOR EACH THEME) >**



BODY TEXT FONT OPTIONS

● - OPTIONS TO TAKE FORWARD

PRIMER PRINT, 26 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet!

ANDIKA BASIC, 22 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet!

STATION, 22 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet! ●

BABY DOLL, 24 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet! ●

BANG WHACK POW, 26 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet! ●

PEYTON JENNIFER, 24 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet!

MIGHTY TO SAVE, 24 PT.

Earth is here, sweet and neat, right under our feet!

TITLE FONT OPTIONS

BLANK SPACE SOLID, 30 PT.

WHERE IS EARTH?

OIL CAN, 30 PT.

WHERE IS EARTH?

SLACKEY, 30 PT.

WHERE IS EARTH?

UCHIYAMA, 30 PT.

WHERE IS EARTH?

VITAMIN, 30 PT.

WHERE IS EARTH?

IRONMAN, 26 PT.

WHERE IS EARTH?

Ways of Seeing

TREATMENT EXPLORATIONS

To begin finalising a suitable style and treatment direction in which to take the eventual illustrations, all the important insights from earlier research and observations from various early-learning-related sources were reexamined in order to arrive at the right treatment for the books.

It was decided that to create art with a bright, bold style and simple yet clear forms and shapes to appeal to the preschool audience, a treatment that would reflect all these aspects would have to be chosen. After successful early explorations with textural collage, it was decided to take the medium of collage forward for the final illustrations of the books.

Collage offers the unique opportunity to combine a variety of interesting materials and textural elements in new and exciting ways for children's illustration. The idea to use natural elements for certain themes like water and earth could also be incorporated into the collages.

Using collage as the unifying visual language throughout the series, illustrations would be developed for each theme using materials pertinent to the particular idea of each book. For example, leaves and twigs could be combined with rough, earthy textures made from crayons and oil pastels in order to create art for the 'Where is Earth?' poem illustrations.

Explorations for the collages were first done digitally, replicating tissue paper and transparent gateway paper effects to create colourful, layered illustrations.

Another exploration involved using vintage botanical drawings combined with digital characters to create the surreal effect of children playing in and interacting with 'larger-than-life' nature scenarios.

DIGITAL LAYERED COLLAGE >





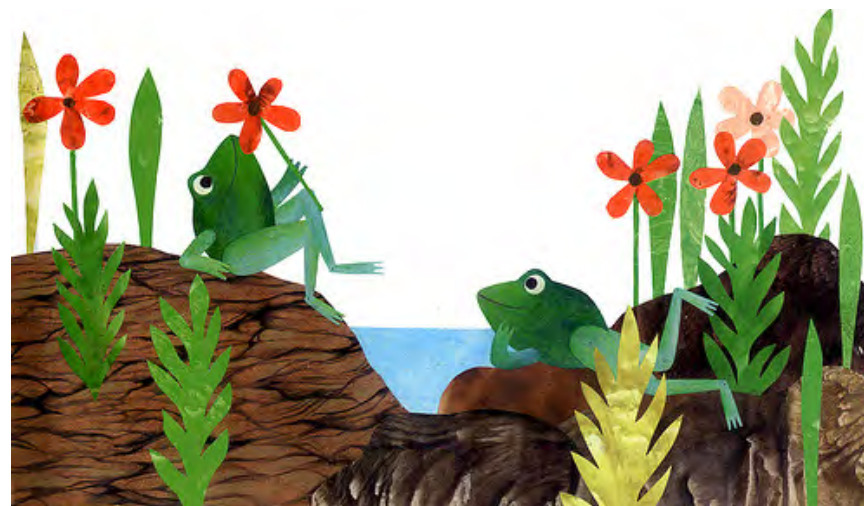




TREATMENT INSPIRATION: COLLAGE ART

Facing Page: (anti-clockwise) Eric Carle, Henri Matisse, Gordon Wiebe

This Page: (clockwise) Leo Lionni, Lois Ehlert, Katharine McEwen



Coming Together

FINAL ILLUSTRATIONS & PROTOTYPES

After collage was narrowed down as the final treatment approaches for the illustrations, the image-making involved placing textural elements together to create whole spreads for each of the poems.

The first spreads from the Earth, Water and Air poems were chosen for prototype-making, and the concept sketches were used as the foundation over which the collages were layered and built.

To generate the effect of a mixed media collage, a large variety of fabric scraps, paper textures and other natural materials like leaves and twigs were scanned and manipulated in the final images to create layered, multidimensional illustrations.

The process of putting the collages together was quite organic and free-flowing, with the materials and textures guiding the evolution of the illustrations rather than any preset compositional and aesthetic decisions being enforced.

For each image spread, digitally painted characters were introduced as playful elements interacting with nature and the environment. Text placement was considered according to the compositions and incorporated into the illustrations.

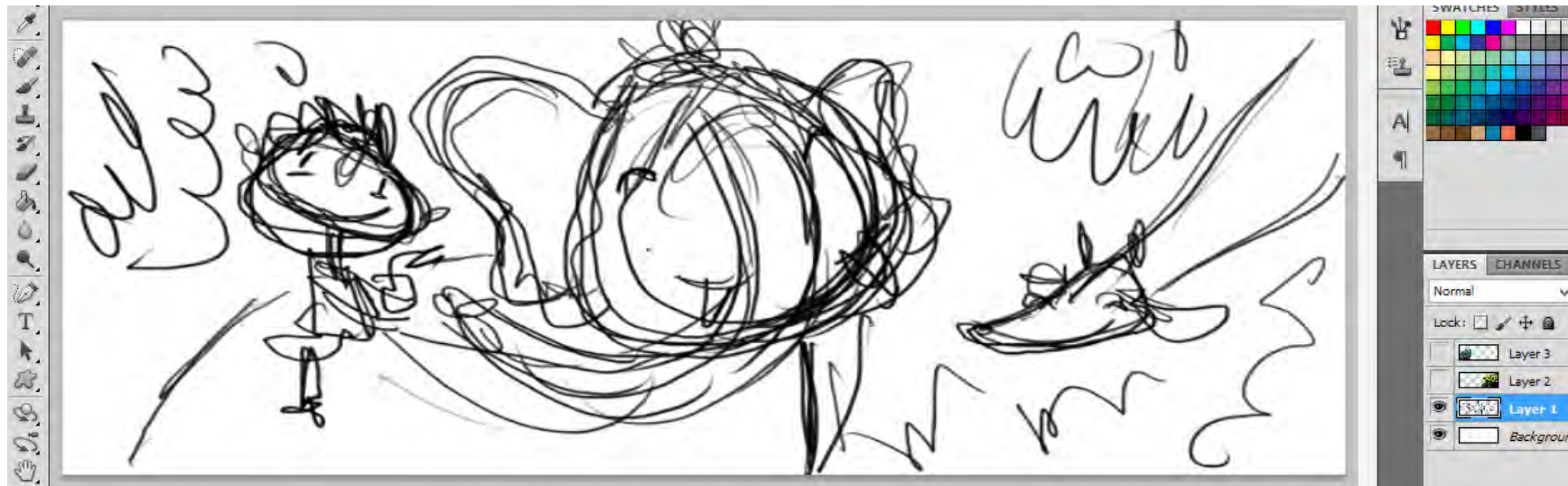
The final prototypes of the spreads were printed in the actual size of the books – as A4 sized, landscape oriented spreads – in order to get a sense of overall size, legibility and appeal.

SCANNED FABRICS &
PAPER TEXTURES >





FINAL PROTOTYPES





Where is Earth?
asks Elephant,
raising trunk to ear.

WATER IS ME! : SPREAD 1











Air is in whales
that live in the sea,
It's in bees and in bugs,
and smart little me.

Moving Forward

FEEDBACK & POSSIBILITIES

Following the creation of the final prototypes, the explorations and work done over the course of the entire project were reviewed by the diploma jury panel in order to assess the quality of work, the process followed, and the way forward.

It was decided that the collage approach should be refined and taken further into creating illustrations for all the poems, while keeping in mind a few important aspects that were offered as feedback by the jury panel.

These suggestions, which could not have come at a better stage in the project, were much appreciated and extremely helpful in outlining a clear path forward with the illustrations and the overall project.

GETTING TO KNOW CHILDREN BETTER

The jury members suggested that while the initial research stage had provided a solid contextual background on which to base the

design development, it was also necessary to take a deeper look into specific aspects of the preschooler audience.

Mona Prabhu, a graphic designer who was the external member on the jury panel, suggested that close interaction and involvement in creative opportunities with young children would offer a better understanding of how I could shape the illustrations in a more effective way in order to hold their attention and interest.

'HAVE YOU BECOME A CHILD?'

Panel member Immanuel Suresh offered many important suggestions on the process of creating illustrated books for children.

He asked, 'Have you become a child while you were making these books?', explaining that placing oneself in a child's shoes could help gain an insight into their way they carry out creative play, and with making a more engaging product for them.

He emphasized that the books should be kindle and sustain the reader's curiosity, and that this could be achieved through magical and creatively engaging illustrations.

Suresh reminded me that young children are highly imaginative and have strong visual memories. As they have yet to pick up reading skills, the pictures and illustrations should be detailed and interesting enough to hold their attention and keep them coming back to the book for more.

SEEING VS. READING

The panel offered valuable suggestions on approaching illustration as a delicate balance between reading a text and viewing an illustration.

The challenge would be to approach image-making for a young audience with the right priorities in mind: do I want children to focus on reading the poems, or do I want them to 'read' the images and then create



(Above) A glimpse of the happy designer after a successful diploma jury presentation

associations to the text based on the visual interpretations in their minds? For preschoolers, it was evident that the latter approach would ensure that the illustrations play an important role in the final books.

PUBLICATION DESIGN INSIGHTS

Specific suggestions on aspects of publication design were offered by all the panel members as a way to improve my

approach to making illustrations for the final series of books.

They reiterated that in creating a series of children's books, issues like text placement, layout and composition could not be overlooked, as they build into the creation of the final books as physical objects for a child to interact with. The illustrations would thus have to be created keeping in mind all these crucial factors.



Endnotes

LOOKING BACK

- Reflections on project
- Learnings from experience

A GRAPHIC DESIGNER IN ILLUSTRATOR'S SHOES

THE NID EXPERIENCE

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Looking Back

REFLECTIONS & LEARNINGS

Looking back on the five months that eventually encompassed my diploma project, I realize that my learning over a short span of time has been far more enriching and life-changing than all my three years at NID put together. To reflect over this experience has been to relive the extreme ups and downs of a challenging and immensely satisfying personal journey.

In the initial stages of the project, I was caught up in a debilitating loop of self-doubt and fear. While I was excited to take up the project as a new experience to dive into, I was also unsure of whether I would follow the right process and whether my work would add any value to the experience.

A direct result of this was a constant 'two steps forward, three steps backward' cycle, in which I would make good progress with work, but then allow my creative doubts to creep in and then revert to questioning every move and decision, resulting in a significant loss of time and confidence. In

hindsight, better personal management of my time would have definitely benefited the quality of the project as I would have put more effort and conviction into my work instead of worrying about whether I was doing the 'right thing.'

As I prepare to graduate from NID, I have also realized how important it is to maintain a professional and ethical relationship with one's client. A project like this required a constant feedback loop, which I failed to maintain with my mentors at Katha as a result of my own shoddy work ethic.

Airing my doubts and seeking help from my guides and mentors at every stage of the project would have helped put my fears at ease and given me the much-needed validation of ideas and boost to move forward confidently.

I have also learnt to acknowledge and admit my personal and creative flaws and shortcomings to myself, and to remind

myself that 'learning as you go' is not a lazy or amateur approach to work. I have always struggled to stay humble and grounded in my work, to learn from everyone and be open to criticism and feedback, and this experience has been extremely valuable in encouraging me to nurture and maintain that creative attitude for the future.

Above all, the diploma experience cemented my self-belief that illustration has come to be my true calling, and that it is what I enjoy doing the most. Nothing made me happier than waking up every day to sketching ideas for the project and letting my creative side go wild through drawing and the various illustration explorations.

I have developed a greater appreciation for children's books as well, and have to come to marvel at their impact and immense potential for change in a child's life. The project reinvigorated my interest in the field and I look forward to more learning opportunities such as this in the near future.

A GRAPHIC DESIGNER IN ILLUSTRATOR'S SHOES

At one point during our discussions for the project, my academic guide Ajay Tiwari asked me an interesting question: 'What do you bring to this illustration experience as a graphic designer?'

The question was an eye-opener as it made me introspect about my choices and decisions as a graphic designer involved in an illustration project. I have yet to label myself specifically as a 'graphic designer,' as I am still too scatter-brained and chaotic in my creative work to be included in the neat, organized realm of graphic design. Yet I realized that many of the learnings and insights from my field of specialization had unconsciously been carried over into my new chosen career path of illustration, without my being fully aware of it.

As a graphic designer I have learnt to put clear and effective communication above everything else, and to make use of strong, simple and honest image-making in telling a story or conveying a message.

These learnings came into play while I was involved in illustration for my diploma project as well, as I find my final illustrations and approaches reflecting this adherence to aspects of simplicity and clarity to convey ideas effectively.

It has been a revelation to realize that illustration, at the end of the day, does go hand in hand with graphic design, and that the two fields, while being seemingly different, share a lot in common and have much to gain from each other.

THE NID EXPERIENCE

I came through the gates of NID riding on a huge stroke of luck. I had applied for a course in graphic design on a whim, having suddenly regained a passion for art and creativity after spending my formative years in college enjoying literature and journalism. Nothing could have prepared me for what NID had in store: over the three years of my stay here, this vibrant campus and its equally colourful inhabitants have filled my life with more fun, exuberance, meaning, laughter and love than I could have ever asked for.

Whenever I questioned my decision to venture into the world of art, NID reassured me that my love for creating and making would not be in vain. Whenever I paused to doubt myself, my friends and peers showed me how to pick myself up and gain and courage in my creative pursuits, and I learnt so much from their awe-inspiring lives.

Thank you NID, for everything. It has been quite the journey!



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- Page 11 : *Up*, Pixar Animation Studios & Walt Disney Pictures, 2009
- Page 29: *My Neighbor Totoro*, Studio Ghibli, 1988
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I LOVE EARTH!

Illustrating Picture Books for Early Learners