



# Illustrators & Photo-Illustrators Guide

by Christina A. Tugeau

Some of the best art around today is in children's books! It's a joy and a privilege to be associated with the children's publishing industry. It's also a constantly changing challenge. The market has always been competitive and cyclical. Artists need to be aware of this fact and plan for it. There is very little room for any mediocrity. What was acceptable just years ago may not be good enough today. Artists need to continually learn, grow, and change. Don't follow trends—make them! Be the very best you can be as an artist and a promoter of your talent, and cherish your passion for your craft.

## WHAT SHOULD I PUT IN MY PORTFOLIO?

Let the art do the talking! It's your style, your characters, your color palette, your conceptual thinking, your design sense that will attract the attention of art buyers. The purpose of a portfolio, whether in a "book," online or in a mailing package, is to get the best you have to offer into the hands of the buyers who might want to hire you. These samples must do the *right* kind of talking for you. It's best and professional to keep the portfolio simple, neat, orderly and a manageable size (9" x 11", or 11" x 14" perhaps, but holding no bigger than 8½" x 11" size pages). You want to present a competent, consistent style and attitude. Don't confuse. Be memorable. Use 10-15 strong pieces of art that show the range and consistency of your talents.

Include full-color and perhaps a few black and white samples (line and/or tone). Show only styles and mediums you are comfortable and proficient with, and can afford to do. Remember: time equals money!. Show only your best work. Any weakness *will* be spotted by the buyers and they will pass. You may show original artwork during a personal visit to a house. Never leave or send original artwork for viewing. If you cannot get in to visit, have a "copy" portfolio with reproductions only that you can leave with publishers for the day or overnight if need be.

Most picture books and educational assignments contain representations of children and/or animals, so you should show both if you do both well. Show character development by having the same characters in different, narrative settings, doing different activities and showing different expressions and moods. Remember to avoid "presentation" poses generally. Picture books story action is going on WITHIN its own world. Characters are normally unaware of the reader/viewer's observations. Your images should reflect

this. Some educational work and greeting cards, may use the "presentation" posture more often.

If you are interested in doing jacket art for middle-grade or young adult (YA) novels, you should also include images of pre-teens and teens in appropriate settings. Perhaps design and show mock jackets with titles as well.

If your interest is in picture books, and you haven't been published yet, or have a story idea you wish to present, the inclusion of a book dummy along with your portfolio will help tell the editor/art director a great deal about the way you "think" about a book. This may reassure him/her that you are knowledgeable of the overall design of picture books. If you have a published book, you might include a copy. Information about how former books have sold might be asked for.

For the dummy, you might illustrate a favorite fairytale, folktale (don't be trite) or re-illustrate another story just for show. Use written text as part of your design and layout. Include one or two finished color pieces of art from the story—work that is highly original, unique, provocative, but at the same time "friendly/accessible" and that will reproduce cleanly (careful of grays and muddled colors). The dummy should also show your ability to draw the same characters consistently and believably, in a variety of settings and positions and attitudes. They will want the illustrations to relate to the manuscript text but give the reader more than just what the words would convey alone. This dummy book will let the editor know that you are at least somewhat familiar with the size, formats, number of pages, text placement possibilities, etc., of picture books. This will reassure them about your ability to work with a house's designer and/or art director on a project.

Lastly, you may include a short resume and "keepers" ("leave behinds," promotional sheets, cards or source book reprint pages) with your portfolio. If you have sent your portfolio and want it returned, send a SASE along as well. But remember that it is the ART that they will remember... or not. Meeting you, the person behind the art, will tell them a lot about how it might be to work with you, but it is ultimately your art itself that will make or break the connection. Leave them with the "WOW FACTOR" and then follow up a few times a year sending them new work on promotional pages.