



A Conversation with Susan Detwiler

Illustrator of
One Wolf Howls,

Panda's Earthquake Escape, Big Cat Little Kitty

And coming 2013

On the Move: Seasonal Migration



You have a very creative professional background—what led you to children's illustration?

I have loved making art from early childhood, and was always attracted to books with great illustrations. By the time I was in high school I decided that being a professional illustrator was my goal. I went to the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and studied graphic design and illustration. While I was a student I worked part-time as a sign painter. After that I got a job in the art department of a printing company, where I learned about how artwork is reproduced. Eventually, I was hired as a staff illustrator for an advertising agency and while I worked there I also began freelancing at night and on weekends. I liked freelance work so much that I decided to do it exclusively. My favorite assignments are for children's publishing and so I seek them out, with help I have found from the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators.

What type of medium do you use for your illustrations? Any particular reason you prefer this?

Pencil is my favorite medium for drawing, but I like watercolor and gouache for painting, and I enjoy drawing in ink, either with a pen or a brush. The illustrations for *One Wolf Howls* were done in watercolor on Strathmore illustration board, but *Pandas' Earthquake Escape* was done entirely in soft pastel on variously colors of paper, which was a fun departure from my usual style. For *Big Cat, Little Kitty*, I combined the two – I applied pastel details to watercolor paintings – because I wanted the colors to be vibrant. Also, I have become more adept at digital media, and use it to augment my images.

How much research do you do when getting ready for a book?

I spend a lot of time at the beginning of a book assignment doing research at the library and online. I like to have many photographs in front of me when I work so that I can fully understand the structure, texture, and light/shadows of what I am trying to depict. It also helps to know other details about the subject, so along with gathering pictures I also read about what I am illustrating.



What is the most frequently asked question you are asked as an illustrator?

I am often asked how long it takes me to do an illustration. Each spread takes several weeks from start to finish.

Any tips for aspiring artists?

Make art often and practice different styles by mimicking your favorite artists' work. Eventually you will have a style that is all your own. Use your ability to make images wherever possible in school, to illustrate reports, make posters for school events, etc.



What is your favorite aspect of the illustration process?

My ideas feed off the ideas of others. When I am given an exciting assignment, my head fills with images and I cannot wait to start to work in the morning. Each new job is an exciting challenge; sometimes I can hardly believe how lucky I am to get paid to do this! My new goal is that my pictures touch people in the same way that I was affected by the illustrations I saw as a child.

