



# Windows into Illustration: William Grill

Article Author:

[William Grill](#) [1]

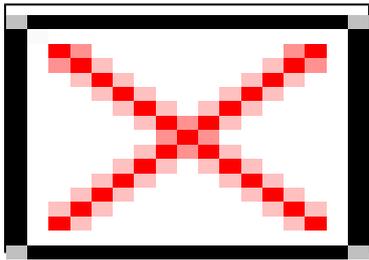
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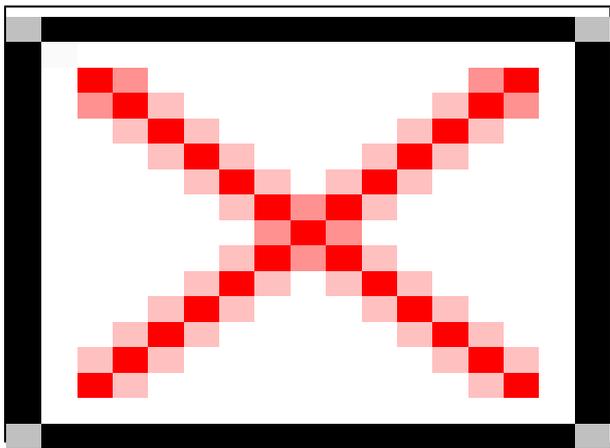
Windows into Illustration

Byline:

The **Kate Greenaway Medal Winner** says illustration is all about communication

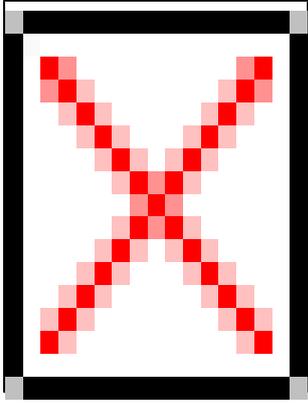


[William Grill](#) [3] was awarded the 2015 **CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal** for **Shackleton's Journey**, in which he used coloured pencils to bring alive the landscapes of Ernest Shackleton's polar expedition. In this article he explains his influences and approach.



In simple terms illustration is all about communication - speaking with images. Whether used independently, or combined with words it offers a huge breadth of storytelling possibilities. This is what really interests me; the different ways we can tell a story; how the medium, colour, design, layout, composition, weight of line all play a part in our effort to communicate.

I've struggled with words for as long as I can remember, both reading and writing. As a child stories intrigued me, but



But big books were intimidating so I found my stories through comics, animation and film. What shaped the outcome of **Shackleton's Journey** was primarily the drive to tell a story favouring pictures over words. Words are important, but I wanted the pictures to carry the emotional weight and real sustenance – almost like a silent film.

In fact, one of the main influential sources for me was looking at the original black and white silent footage shot by expedition photographer Frank Hurley. For me that is still the best re-telling of the story. The imagery, grainy and rough, depicts all manner of details trivial and extreme, from caring for dogs to the Endurance battering her way through 3ft thick ice. I love the texture of the footage itself, but also the everyday nature of Hurley's scenes of the crew; even without words they seem very much human.

When creating the story I tried to imagine myself as recording the whole event like a cameraman with the added ability to pull back and look down upon the scene like a bird up high. This allowed me lots of options that were unavailable to Hurley shooting first person. The same is true in creating any picture book; the only real limit is your own imagination. Composition has to be one of the most important aspects to a picture book; if you can think of a smarter, clearer way to communicate something all the better. The challenge for me was thinking around the text. Cutting it down meant I had to employ different techniques to carry the story forward: full bleed, cut to white, vignettes, maps, visual lists, diagrams, panels and sometimes a combination of these.

Luckily my practice of working in colouring pencil seemed in line with the feel of the story. I wanted the book to have a quiet, soft tone to reflect the otherworldly atmosphere of Antarctica, and the texture and lithograph-like quality of pencil on heavy cartridge paper worked well. Use of white space helped me to give the book a sense of space and stillness. I look up to British illustrators like Eric Ravilious and Raymond Briggs, another big influence would have to be Frédéric Back's **The Man Who Planted Trees**. To me all these artists share a common root in drawing; they work to the strength of their medium, showing how much you can squeeze out of limited means. There's also a sense of industriousness to their work, the sheer amount of it, all the captured little moments, though somehow it never looks laboured over.

**[Shackleton's Journey](#)** [4] is published by Flying Eye Books, 978-1909263109, £14.99 hbk

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