



Windows into Illustration: Victoria Turnbull

Article Author:

[Victoria Turnbull](#) [1]

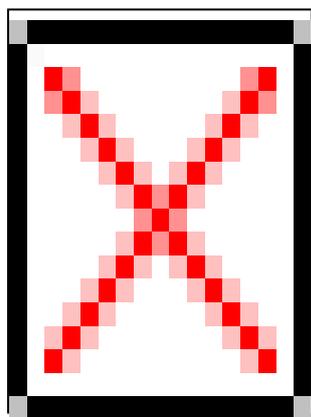
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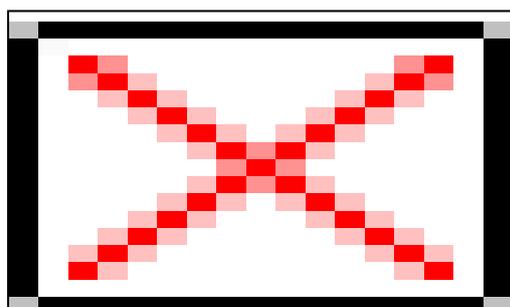
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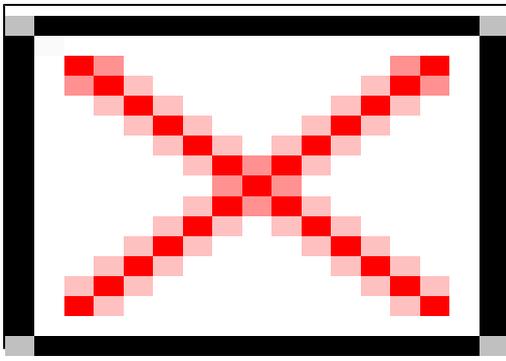
Victoria Turnbull won the 2013 **Association of Illustrators New Talent Award**, Children's Book category, and her first book **The Sea Tiger** was nominated for the Kate Greenaway Medal and shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize. She has since written and illustrated **Kings of the Castle** and **Pandora**, and illustrated **Is It Really Nearly Christmas?** by Joyce Dunbar. Here she describes the technique used creating the 'deeply personal' **Cloud Forest**.

The opening scene is one of my favourite illustrations from **Cloud Forest**. The characters are standing under a fruit tree, looking up at a bird that has interrupted their reading. It's an important moment in the book because it's where you are introduced to the narrator and their Umpa for the very first time. I wanted the reader to be curious and captivated enough to turn the page. So prior to this, I'd spent a lot of time drawing and getting to know my characters.

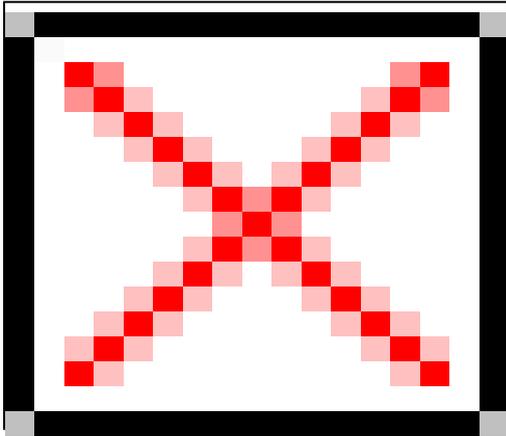
Gorillas are such beautiful, intelligent creatures they are easily anthropomorphised. As well as thinking of my own grandfather, I considered Umpa to be a primate version of Charles Darwin or Edward Lear.



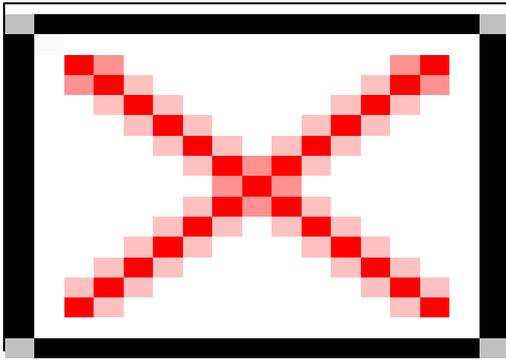
When I originally roughed out this spread, Umpa and his grandchild were in the background, with the garden taking centre stage. They soon asserted their authority, however, and pushed themselves to the fore.



I drew the artwork in pencil on tracing paper. Starting with the most important element, the characters, I built the scene around them ? this involved some cutting and pasting to resolve the layout. I had a list of things I wanted to include in the garden but as I started to draw, as is often the case, I became less concerned with mistakes that reveal a lack of research and more concerned with mistakes that may break the narrative spell.

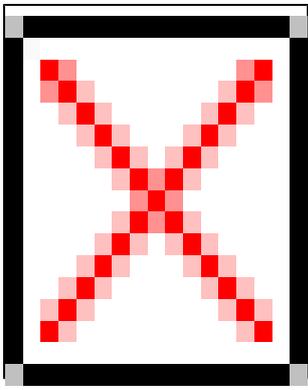


The geography of the cloud forest helped me to create the story, but it was my memories that brought it to life. The text on this spread says ?it was my favourite place? and I wanted the reader to feel that there is nowhere those characters would rather be. My own grandparents lived in a bungalow on a nondescript housing estate. Two giant plum trees grew from the tiny front lawn and served as a gateway to the imagination. Upon entering, my sister and I could become anything we wanted to be, in a world of our choosing. The only limit was our imaginations. I wanted this spread to capture my memories of those perfect summer days.



I combined my pencil drawings in Photoshop and printed them out onto watercolour paper. I used washes of pigment and linseed oil to build up colour before adding more detail in coloured pencil. I wanted this illustration to have a warm colour palette. My own childhood memories have a yellow colour cast like an old photograph. Yellow is the colour of summer; the colour of my grandfather?s favourite flowers; the colour of hope.

Books and the legacy of shared stories are central to this piece of work. As the story evolved, I included references to creators



of images that I remember from childhood or those that influence my work today such as E.H. Shepard, Maurice Sendak and Walt Disney. **Cloud Forest** is a deeply personal book; I hope others can join their life and their imagination to what I have to share.

Cloud Forest is published by Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 978-1786031778, £12.99 hbk

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