Cabin Tales Episode X: "Picture a Story" (Interviews with Illustrators)
Episode Transcript

[0:00] Intro

[crickets; music]

Welcome to Cabin Tales: Spooky Stories for Young Writers. This is Episode X: "Picture a Story." This is one of two special episodes on the podcast this month. Today's show has a "talking tales" format, meaning it's all interviews, but it's a little different from what's usually on the podcast. Because today you're going to hear from five great Canadian illustrators, artists who tell stories through images as well as words. I'm Catherine Austen, and my guests today are Peggy Collins, Katherine Battersby, Farida Zaman, Christine Tripp, and Chris Jones. They've illustrated over 100 books altogether, and they've written many, too. They've created picture books, early readers, comics, and graphic novels for all ages. And they're going to tell you how they make their beautiful stories. Because there's more than one way to tell a tale. These artists have years of experience in picturing stories. And some of their best advice is coming up right now on Cabin Tales. So listen in.

[crickets]

[1:15] Interviews

So far on Cabin Tales, you've heard from writers of all genres about how they develop settings and characters, where they find ideas for stories, how they build on those ideas to create plots, and how they unfold their plots in a way to create tension and keep readers gripped. Well, today you're going to hear from

storymakers who do all of those things in a slightly different way. Because they are all artists. And when we "read" their stories, we discover their settings and characters and plots in images as well as words.

So if you are a young storyteller whose ideas come to you in pictures, then you're in for a treat. And if you are not artistic in any visual way, or at least you think you're not, then you're in for a treat, too. Because today's guests are so inspiring, they just might encourage you to try creating a story through images. [music]

[2:15] Commentary on how picture books are made

You probably know that picture books are sometimes written and illustrated by the same person, and sometimes written by one person and illustrated by another. In that second scenario, you might imagine the author and the illustrator working closely together in their collaboration. But that is rarely the case. Far more commonly, a writer completes the text before the artist begins the pictures. When a picture book is developed within a traditional publishing house, what happens is an editor finds a story she likes from among the thousands of stories submitted each year, and she offers the writer a contract and advises the writer on revisions to the text. And then she contracts an artist to do the pictures—she might have a particular artist in mind as she reads the submission or she might try a new artist whose works intrigues her. But what she does not do is put the writer and the artist together. Not unless they've worked together on books before and this is a true collaboration. Usually, the writer is kept away from the artist so that the artist can develop his own vision of the story.

It's not that writers are bossy—well, actually, it is kind of that. The writer would like to tell the artist how to make their pictures. And that is not conducive to art. An artist must be able to have their own vision, their own visual way of telling the story. So first the artist will storyboard the narrative and do thumbnail sketches of the pages to establish the composition and pacing, and then they'll do rough art, and then final art. The writer will get a look at things somewhere along the way. The writer can point out factual errors or concerns. So, as the writer, you can say, "You've drawn a pelican but the story is about a crane; I think you should make some adjustments." That is a perfectly valid comment for a writer. But the writer cannot say, "I don't like the way you've drawn the cranes. I don't think cranes should wear glasses. I was picturing a more realistic art style." No. That is not okay. The artist must have the freedom to create their vision of the story. So it's the artist and the editor who work out the final images, just as it was the writer and the editor who worked out the final text. And hopefully everybody's happy at the end of it.

I have a picture book in an artist's hands right now. Sean Cassidy is finishing the final art on our picture book, "The Squirrels Stole my Sister," which is forthcoming with the publisher Fitzhenry and Whiteside. I have seen an image, and I saw Sean's roughs, but I've yet to see the final book. And that will be such a treat. It really is a gift as a writer to have an artist illustrate your work and to see their vision of your story.

Interviews about working alone and with other writers

All of today's guests have illustrated other writers' stories. And most have also illustrated their own stories. I asked about how the process is different, creating a

story in your own words and images versus creating images to tell a story that is already written.

[music]

[5:15] Chris Jones likes working with writers

My first guest today is Chris Jones. He has illustrated over 20 books for young readers, including picture books and graphic novels. He's created comics for all ages, and his work has appeared in many magazines. He's very active in the Canada East branch of the SCBWI – that's the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. I had met Chris very briefly before this podcast, but I didn't really know him at all, and I was so inspired by him in the interview. He's currently working on a book about ladybugs, and he says he thrives in collaborative creative projects.

[music]

CJ: I write comics for magazines and I illustrate those as well. I've written some graphic novels. And I have a few picture book dummies that I'm circulating. So yeah, I do write as well. But sometimes I struggle with that side of it, so sometimes when I can collaborate — Sometimes that accountability is good motivation for me. Because sometimes it's hard to keep motivated when you're working on your own stuff without someone to hold you to a timeline. Because sometimes I find things slide and you're like, 'Oh well.' You don't work on it as much as you can.

CA: We will do things for others that we will not do for ourselves.

CJ: That's exactly right, yes. … For when I'm working on my own, I find when there's so much freedom, I find I'm a little bit sometimes unsure where to go with it. Sometimes it's good to have, like a box to play in, instead of like in a wide open field, because then you can really focus in on what you're working on better than if I have too much freedom. Sometimes I'm like, 'I don't know. I could do this; I could do this; I could do this.' But when I'm working on someone else's, I'm like, 'Okay, the story's set.' I don't have to question the story; that's set. So that takes a lot of pressure off and I can feel the freedom just to dive into treating that the best way I can visually rather than when I'm working on my own, I kind of second guess the words as I'm drawing. And its back and forth, back and forth, and it's more unsure. I find working on others' stories, it's different and sometimes I enjoy it more because I know I'm good at the illustration side. I'm not as confident in my writing. So, I feel like I can have less self-doubt and get to the point and work on it.

[music]

[7:40] Peggy Collins feels the responsibility

My next guest is Peggy Collins. She has illustrated over a dozen picture books, and she's written a few, too. She teaches character design development. She also runs a design business. She raises children. She volunteers for the SCBWI. And she still had time for an interview for this podcast. Peggy and I used to be in an online picture book critique group together. And I see her beautiful imagery every day because I have one of her prints hanging up in my office. Peggy finds a radical difference between illustrating her own stories versus other people's stories.

[music]

PC: Illustrating someone else's work is a tremendous responsibility. It's really stressful. It's great because you're getting, like, somebody else's story, and it's such an honor to get somebody else's words to be able to turn them into pictures. But I'm always worried that I'm completely screwing it up, and that what I'm giving them they're going to be super disappointed with. And so, I'm trying hard to make sure that the work that I'm giving is going to be not disappointing. It's a huge responsibility. It's terrifying.

I actually would really like somebody to illustrate my words. And I was kind of partially hoping that that would happen this time. I've said that to a few of my publishers. Like, 'Honestly, if you want to hire somebody else, it's totally okay.' 'Oh no, you're an illustrator.' I'm like, 'Yeah but I don't know." I'm really glad I'm illustrating my book, but I was kind of tired of it when I was done writing it. And I figured somebody else would have better ideas than I would in terms of the art. But as it turns out, I get to do the art too.

[music]

[9:20] Katherine Battersby finds unexpected freedom

My next guest is Katherine Battersby. Her 10th picture book was just published this month: *Perfect Pigeons*. Katherine grew up in Australia but she now lives in Canada. And we're all the better a country for that. I met Katherine through the SCBWI when I was already a fan of her "Squish Rabbit" picture books. Katherine usually creates stories where the words and pictures evolve together in her mind, but she has illustrated other people's texts, too. And she agrees that illustrating someone else's story has its own special angst.

[music]

KB: It's really different. I think when it's your own story, and when it's originated inside you, the art is wrapped up in the idea and it all kind of comes out together. Like I have a lot of trouble telling the difference between writing and illustration when it's all mine. And when I'm illustrating my own work, I feel like I only have myself to disappoint. And I'm okay with disappointing myself. But I'm really not okay with disappointing anybody else. So, illustrating someone else's work, it really does carry a different weight to it. I've only done it once. It was a series of five books with the same author and the same publisher. And I think I was really lucky in that they loved everything I did, which surprised me constantly. So I had a really great one and only experience, because I was terrified. And in a way, it kind of freed me up to experiment with style in a way that I wouldn't do with my own work. I was playing with new things and learning in a different kind of way, which was exciting. I hadn't really realized that it might allow me to do different things. But it did hold a different kind of terror. I often end up feeling a bit like Peggy, where being both writer and illustrator, I feel like illustration, it might not be the harder job of the two, but it's definitely the longer, longer, longer job of the two. So, I regularly write something and think, 'Oh, maybe someone else could illustrate this for me. Maybe it doesn't have to be me.' But I haven't managed that yet either, Peggy. It's always me.
[music]

[11:45] Christine Tripp has fun

Next you're going to hear from Christine Tripp. She has illustrated more than 50 books for educational publishers, plus trade books and magazine pages. Chris is based in Ottawa, and like all of today's guests, she's an active member of the SCBWI. I've met Chris many times, and she is so down-to-earth and humble, you wouldn't realize how artistically talented she is – until you see her work. She says that as a kid, drawing was what she loved to do and what she was best at doing. And she says that now, as the artist in so many collaborative works, she gets the fun job.

[music]

CT: I had no worries about the author whatsoever. Not because I didn't care. I just didn't even think about that. I thought, 'Okay, now it's my turn.' I really enjoy it. I've always said I'd rather illustrate someone else's story. And I'm sure there have been stories that maybe weren't your own cup of tea. You know, maybe they weren't that inspiring for me. But when they are, it's — I just think it's a lot of fun. I think they've taken all the hard work out of it, and now they've left me with something I can visualize. And you read it a couple of times and right away you know

exactly what you're going to do. 'Oh, I can see this, I can see that.' I like that they're doing, like I say, the hard work. To me, writing is the hard work. Illustrating is the fun.

[13:10] Farida Zaman on having control

My final guest today is Farida Zaman. The first time I spoke to Farida was in the interview for this podcast. And it was such a treat. She's so inspiring. Farida has illustrated over a dozen picture books and early readers, and this year she published her first book that she both wrote and illustrated herself, *I Want to Be: A Gutsy Girl's ABC*. Farida also designs maps and jigsaw puzzles and posters and all sorts of beautiful things. And while she loves to illustrate other people's texts, she appreciates the control that an author-illustrator has over how a narrative unfolds in both words and images.

[music]

FZ: I do like doing projects that I love, that I can really relate to. And it's really exciting working on my own book, because it's like nurturing a child, inside out. You've written the story and you're also illustrating it. So you're wearing two hats at the same time. You're thinking for two people. You know, when I was working on "Gutsy Girl," I got to experience that. I find that very exciting and very humbling, actually. I guess you've got full control. Simple as that, right? You're talking to two people in one body. And it's just nice to do something from start to finish on your own. I don't know, it's a very very gratifying to be able to do. I've always wanted to do it. I never thought I could. So it's very humbling to me to be able to do it.
[music]

[15:00] Interviews about developing characters in images

In Episodes 2 and 2.5 of Cabin Tales, you heard children's and young adult authors talk about how they develop their characters. Characters really are at the heart of a story, whether it's told in words or pictures. Some authors meet a character in their mind and get to know them on the page while drafting their story. Other authors do side-writing exercises to discover their characters before they draft. They might interview a character or detail a character's backstory. For illustrators, character development is a little different, though surprisingly similar. The maxim

“Show don’t Tell” goes without saying. Artists must show their audience a character not just from all angles but in all moods and situations. I asked today’s guests about what they do to develop their characters.

Here’s Peggy Collins, who teaches a course on character design development. And the oohing and ahhing in the background of this clip come from Katherine Battersby and Christine Tripp, who were on the zoom interview when Peggy held up a page showing an adorable animal character in various poses.

[music]

[16:10] Peggy Collins loves designing characters

PC: I could stay in the character design development phase forever. It's my favorite thing about making stories. If I didn't actually have to illustrate, and I could just design the characters and pass them off for somebody to illustrate, I would be happy. I hope my publishers don't listen to this. I am illustrating. But this is an example of, like, one of the things -- I know your viewers aren’t going to see it but – [oohs and ahs]. So I teach character design. That’s my job essentially. That's what I teach, for animation. And so this would be an exercise that I would do, where I take add shapes and I apply the shapes to my characters, and just kind of push them and play with them and try and get things going. And then, there you can see up on the wall, there's some little animations and head turns and posings. But I've probably -- I'm working on three books right now, for three different places -- but I've probably illustrated this dog from beginning to end over 500 times. So for me, I sketch nonstop my characters until I find them. And I don't know when I'm going to find them. They just kind of appear and then they stay that way. And then they pop up in the margins at meetings, and they pop up on napkins when I'm at a restaurant. They just they just keep showing themselves. And then I know that I'm on the right track. I love character design. That's what I teach, that and concept art. Illustrating is great. I love it. But the character design is like the bomb. And if I never had to do a background ever, I'd be happy.
[music]

[17:45] Chris Jones develops his characters in action

Chris Jones does some character exploration in hard sketches before he begins, but he mostly meets his characters as he creates his scenes.
[music]
CJ: I do probably some initial character exploration, very small, just to get the shapes and the basic -- because that's the most important part. But I find, rather than spending too much time

developing the character before I start the storyboarding, I'll do a little bit and then I'll do the storyboarding. Because as I'm doing the storyboarding, I'm redrawing that character many times. And as I work through the story and with them in different scenes and poses, that develops their character as I'm working on them without really focusing on them. I'm just working to tell the story. But I find that when I just don't spend too much time developing them before I do the storyboard, then they kind of take shape and come to life in the way that, 'Oh, this is how they could look. Their nose could be this way, this way.' Because I'm drawing it so many times, and then it kind of morphs and takes care of itself as I work on the storyboard.
CA: Have you ever done a series, of the same characters in more than one book?
CJ: Yes, I've done a few books with Gymnasium. He was like a kid and he did different sports every book. And in my adult stuff, when web comics were huge, I did those for a while and I would do the same characters every week. I love working with the same characters because then you get familiar with them and you're like, 'Oh, I know how they would react in this situation.' And then it becomes easier the more you work with them. You're like, 'Oh, okay, this is easy. They're going to do this. And this is going to lead to this.' And it's fun. And then the more you draw them, the better you get at it and it becomes like just more fun, because it's less work in that way, where you're just in it instead of trying to figure out how things work. Because you've already kind of figured that out through the time that you spent on it. And that also is motivation to keep going. Like, a one-off or a single thing is good, but when you have a series, you're like, 'Oh, I want to do the next thing on this series.' So I use it as motivation as well.
[music]

[19:45] Christine Tripp has her characters in her head

Christine Tripp likewise does a few character sketches beforehand, but then she launches right into her scene, following images that she sees clearly in her mind.
[music]
CT: I do do some character sketches first, a few poses and things, especially of course if the publisher asks for you to send something like that. Sometimes they do want to see that, in different positions and doing different things. So I do some of that. I tend to launch right into just drawing the first page. And I just work from the first spread or the first page on. Usually I have it all in my head. I'm seeing how it should look. It doesn't always translate onto paper, unfortunately, but I kind of know which direction I'm going. I research the background, though. I do an awful lot of Google imaging. You know, you try and find furniture and backgrounds and colours and wallpapers and get some kind of an idea. Because I'm not terribly creative on that side of it. I tend to draw the same kind of chair or same kind of table. So I keep trying to add a little bit more to that.
[music]

[21:20] Farida Zaman steps inside her characters

Farida Zaman points out that developing a character is about so much more than what they look like.

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CA: Say you're working on a picture book, do you do a bunch of character sketches?
FZ: Totally. Totally. I think that's really important. Because you have to you know see that the character works and, you know, she looks or he looks the same on every page but doing different things, right?. The other thing, it's almost like you become the character. You should become the character. You should really have that connection with that character. Over years, you know -- initially I wasn't so much into this, but over years I kind of really kind of developed the knack of climbing into that character's person. You really really connect with that person then, right? Who is she? You know, what is she? What makes her different? What's her personality? Can I see that personality shine through her face?
CA: And with character sketches, for kids, it takes them by surprise how much art you make in order to get just the art that's in the book.
FZ: Oh yeah. I would say like 30% of the stuff that I do of a project you never see.
[music]

[22:30] Katherine Battersby traps characters on paper

Katherine Battersby develops her character in her mind for a long time before drawing them, and she doesn't do a lot of sketching.

[music]

KB: This is the one thing that made me feel like a fraud as an illustrator for years, and I have just kind of come to grips with it's just my way. So, I watch my characters in my mind, often for six months before I put pen to paper. They move and they play and they run and they interact and they change. And then often when I put pen to paper, they stay the same from the moment I touch pen to paper the whole way through their life with me and through the book. So, I'm not an illustrator who sketches much at all, which always made me feel like a fake, like publishers were going to discover this and never never publish me. But characters are very filmic to me. Putting them on paper traps them in one form. So I don't want to draw them until I've watched them from every angle and seen the way they move and interact with the world in my head. That said, the sketching phase to me is discovering the story. So often my early sketches I go back and look at, and the things that the character was first interacting with inspires the direction the story goes. So that's kind of the most playful, imaginative part for me. So yeah, I'm an illustrator who barely sketches.
[music]

[24:10] Commentary on the Fear of Drawing

When you think of an artist, you might imagine someone with a pencil and sketchbook in hand. And for sure, many artists always have those at hand. But

many artists, like Katherine Battersby, are not sketchers. The mediums available even to those who work in hard materials don't require a love of drawing. And computers expand all those mediums. You might think you're not cut out to be an illustrator because you don't like to draw or you don't draw well. But that's not the most essential thing. Dr. Seuss did not draw exquisitely, at least not in a drafting sense – a drawing instructor might have called his animals "interesting." But those interesting animals are part of his signature style and part of the charm of his books. Maurice Sendak – everyone would agree that he could draw, right? But he initially conceived his classic picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, as *Where the Wild Horses Are*. And he said, "The dilemma arose when it became obvious that I couldn't draw horses…. [and this is still quoting Sendak] The truth about the creative process is that it's a hard-line nitty-gritty business of what you can and cannot do – what your limitations are as an artist." Well, isn't it wonderful that he couldn't draw horses? Isn't it wonderful that he didn't let that limitation stop him from telling his stories in words and pictures?

You may be gifted with unlimited drawing ability. Or you may be able to draw only a few things. Whatever you can draw, in whatever style you like to draw, you can tell a story in images. Brian McLachlan says in his how-to book, *Draw Out the Story*, "It's not about how well you can draw. It's about how well people can understand what you draw." There's a difference. While there are many gorgeous and visually complex animated shows and movies, some of the most successful are the most simplistically rendered. And it's the same with picture books. Sometimes the most simple images can deliver the deepest emotions.

And you don't have to draw a thing to create a story in pictures. The Extraordinary Correspondence of *Griffin & Sabine* became a huge success among adult readers because of its intriguing mixed media and the story it told, not because it was well drawn. Nancy Rose makes her adorable squirrel picture books with photographs – she doesn't have to draw a thing. Claire Beaton stitches her picture book illustrations in fabric, and her simple pictures are captivating and joyful.

And while it's true that you will awe me if you can sit down and draw a portrait that actually looks like the person you're drawing, that doesn't mean you're going to awe me with your story. As Will Eisner said in his book, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*, "The storyteller must first have something to tell, and then must be able to master the tools to relay it." The something to tell is always the most important thing, whether you tell your story in words or pictures or music or dance. You have something to say, you know you do. Don't let a fear of drawing stop you from saying it in images. You do need to master some medium, some form, but you don't have to be Doré or Durer. Although they were both pretty fab, I gotta say. But you don't have to be them. You just have to be you.

[music]

[27:40] Interviews about traditional and digital art

I heard a picture book artist a few years ago say that she was afraid to draw by hand now that she worked so often on computer, where you can save and change your work easily and never lose anything. I asked today's guests about how the transition to digital art has affected their creative process. Here's Christine Tripp.

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[28:20] Christine Tripp likes the safety of digital art

CT: I'm much more willing to take chances and risks because I know I can just simply erase it and start over again. I also don't lose what I already did. I can save that and copy over it, trace it. Where, paper, it was — especially going from the sketch stage into the starting to work on it — if I choose a colour and I've changed my mind somewhere in there, basically unless I'm really lucky, I have to start all over again. And the sketch is never as good as the first sketch and the spontaneity is gone. I do feel a little more comfortable and safe doing it digitally.

I work on a Cintiq. So everything is done there, from sketches to the painting to final work. I'm not very techie, but luckily this machine knows what it's doing. So, I just go along. But it's been wonderful. I'm still happy with the transition from paper and pencils and pen. I don't miss it. A lot of people have said they do. I'm not missing any of it.

[music]

[29:20] Farida Zaman misses her pencils

And here's Farida Zaman who, unlike Chris, is a little nostalgic for paper and pencil.

FZ: Oh my god, it totally spoils you. It totally spoils you. I look at some of my old books that I did like 20 years ago, and I can't believe that I did not even think of the computer back then. I just did it. It was a one-take exercise. No room for mistakes. You just did it. And it was fine. I guess the opportunities, the options are so much now that it can really really really spoil you. There's nothing like looking at hand-drawn sketches. We're doing less and less of that now. I do a lot of my sketches on Procreate, which takes me away from not using a graphite pencil, which is so sad.

I work with watercolors primarily. Sometimes I will add gouache to my watercolors. You know, and sometimes I'll add a bit of mixed media as well, coloured pencils and collage. And then what I do these days — I never used to before – I take it into the computer and I clean it up. Or once in a while do a bit of embellishment on Procreate on my iPad. There's all these new techniques that I sort of picked up along the way that helps me out.

[music]

[30:40] Katherine Battersby finds freedom in digital imagery

Katherine Battersby is actually less afraid of hard copies now than she used to be.

KB: It's not working digitally that made me afraid of working on paper. I was always afraid of working on paper. I have anxiety. So I think it probably translates to being an illustrator. I was always really bound up in working on the page. So working digitally does offer me a kind of freedom that I never really had on the page, and a playfulness and a boldness. But oddly enough, I work almost completely digitally now, and I do so much work on the computer that when I do

get the chance to go back on paper, now it's freed me, because I carry that playfulness with me back to paper. And I think I get to experience the tactile-ness and the texture of it, like I get to rediscover it. So weirdly, I think digitally working has made me more free on the paper because now I play on paper more because it takes me away from work, because all of my work is on the computer. So it's kind of done the opposite for me.

So, I work with all sorts of things as an artist. I work kind of in a collage style. I start with ink and pencil. I use bits of watercolor. I use textiles and fabrics. I make my own papers. I scan in all the papers and textures and fabric and bits and pieces from the world that I find, and then I put them all together digitally using primarily Photoshop and then Procreate on my iPad. So "digital collage" is the best way to describe what I do.

[music]

[32:25] Peggy Collins is happier with her tech

Peggy Collins embraces the digital revolution, but she warns that it's easy to lose sight of the big picture when you can zoom into a screen.

PC: I actually just invested in a iPad Pro when I realized that my tools for teaching were substantially subpar for my classes. So I took the leap after, the last iPad I had is 10 years old. I have a big desktop monitor that I work on. I scan in a lot of stuff. I still work on paper. A lot of my ideas get hashed out on paper. I have a million sketchbooks and random bits of paper and I'm just always kind of thinking until it's time to produce. And then I jump on my device, whichever I'm doing. I'm loving this iPad. I got it 2 weeks ago. I'm doing an entire book on it and, like, my life is so much happier. This tool has been a game changer. But I have to be careful because the tendency for me that I struggle with all the time is to get too tight with things and to get too perfect with lines and to add too many details. And with digital, you can zoom right in to the tiniest little thing. And if you're like me and you get obsessed with those tiny little things, you can spend a lot of time fixing something that when it's printed really is inconsequential. And it also makes the looseness disappear. And this is something that I have had to work through my whole career. So I consciously approach the iPad with a really loose style and I'll use really thick brushes on purpose so that I don't do that. But I have to be hyper aware of it. And if I get too much into it, I have to switch hands and use my left hand so I don't. Because I don't want to do that. It's not the work that I want to make. It's just the work that I feel compelled to do in so many ways and so it's a battle.

[music]

[34:15] Chris Jones refines his sketches digitally

Chris Jones understands. He still loves pencil and paper, though he works on computer, too. And like many creative people, he finds that the materials matter.

CJ: I made the switch to digital maybe in 2007. But I always do my initial thumbnail sketches, storyboards, traditionally. I work on tracing paper with pencil crayon. I start with like a light red pencil crayon and then I go up to a black pencil crayon. Because I love tracing paper because I flip it and I can trace overtop of things I want to change. And I work really small. Like my thumbnails are like 1 inch by 1 inch. So it lets me focus on the composition instead of details. Because if I work any bigger, I get into the details, and then I'm like, what am I doing? I'm wasting my time, at that stage. So yeah, so I do all that sketching. Then I scan it and then I do refined sketches digitally, and the colour and ink and everything else digitally. But I always love to, I think better when I'm sketching on paper. But it has to be specific — I'm very particular. I have to have the exact type of paper and the exact type of pencil. The paper has to feel a certain way, or else I'm not in it. It's infuriating. I wish I could draw on anything, but I'm very particular.
CA: I think kids understand that, too. I mean, you can draw with anything. But sometimes when they get their hands on something really nice it's like, whoa.
CJ: This changes everything. Yeah. It's like my advice would be to find a medium and material and combination that really feels good to you, physically and mentally. And it just helps the flow. It frees you up to really dive in without worrying about, 'Oh the material, it's fighting against me.' You know, everyone has their personal preferences, but I find that's key for me, is to just find the exact materials that really let you let loose instead of worrying about how it's fighting against you.
[music]

[36:20] Illustrators' advice to young writers and artists.

All of today's guest author-illustrators began to draw and make up stories when they were kids. They know what it's like to be a young person with something to say in more than just words. And they have some advice to aspiring young illustrators who might be listening. First up is Katherine Battersby.

[music]

[36:30] Katherine Battersby: Read, play, be yourself

KB: My 3 bits of advice would be to read, to play, and to be yourself. So with reading, if you love to write and you love to draw, engage with that art form as much as you can. Read. And you know, there are all sorts of stories. You can watch films, you can watch TV shows, you can engage with story through computer games and musicals and theatre. Wherever your passion is, get as much of it as you can. It's really inspiring. With play, things can become work really quickly. And I would encourage kids to go where your joy is. So, whatever brings you joy, whatever makes you laugh and smile, play with your art. Enjoy it. Don't do it if it's not bringing you joy. Enjoy it. And with be yourself, outside of art entirely, anything you do that makes you feel good, and makes you feel like you, is going to feed your art. So again, similar to play,

whatever brings you joy, follow it. If you love music, if you love travel, if you love being with other kids, if you love sports, anything you do that makes you feel like yourself and makes you feel good is going to feed back into your art really beautifully.
[music]

[37:50] Peggy Collins: Your stories matter

And here's Peggy Collins' advice.

PC: I would say your stories matter. All of the stories matter. And if it matters to you, it's probably going to matter somebody else, too. To not give up when people tell you you're not good. Just keep working at it. And then, have fun. And don't give up. Because I have multiple times talked about just like, just cutting ties with all of it, moving into animation or doing something completely different. Because it's so frustrating sometimes. And it's really hard sometimes. People think it's like the best job in the world but – and it is – but it's also fraught with… yeah, it's just hard sometimes to keep positive about it. You know, rejections are happening. Just don't give up. I'm finally working with the publisher that I really really want to work with. Not that the publishers that I worked with before are not amazing. But you know how sometimes you kind of have this goal in mind of somebody that you really want to work with, and then you finally get there and you're like, 'Oh yes, okay. This is what it's like over here.' And so don't give up.
[music]

[38:50] Farida Zaman: Everyone has a story

Farida Zaman has lots of encouragement.

FZ: I think, find inspiration in where you are and what you like to do. I think everyone has a story. Everyone has a story, whether you write or you don't write. And I think it's just important to kind of start spending some time thinking about the person that you are, and how you can make a difference in someone else's life with your story. Because everyone is special. Everyone has a story. And really, never to give up. Not to be discouraged. Because it's so easy to be discouraged in our industry. And we are already sensitive people. And it's a competitive world.

And I'd also suggest to young writers that it doesn't matter what level you're at, I think it's nice to have a little, form a little group of people who like to write, for instance. Read your story out to them. And I think you learn from each other. I'm part of a group of SCBWI writers. And we basically read our stories to each other. And each one of us has something, a lot to offer in terms of feedback. And I've learned so much from them. And I think it's fantastic to have that. You cheer each other on.
[music]

[40:10] Christine Tripp: Don't be in a rush

Christine Tripp reminds you to take your time.

CT: I'd say don't be in a rush. Not personal experience, but I see a lot of people who, you know, either they write, they illustrate and write, or they're illustrating, and they start sending things out right away. And not really researching publishing, what it's about, the pitfalls, the ups, the downs. They just go to everybody. And they get rejections and rejections, rejections. And then they just quit. Or they end up in the wrong hands and they get their heart broken and their bank account fleeced. So, I would just say, it's like any other career. You don't have to go to school for it. You don't have to. But you do have to school yourself. So get as much get as much education as you can on it, on the publishing, before you enter the rest of it.
[music]

[41:20] Chris Jones: Don't get discouraged

And Chris Jones has great advice for staying true to yourself through the long haul.

CJ: Yes, it can be difficult and it can be discouraging. And you know, it feels like there's all these gatekeepers and you can't get in. And, 'Why am I not good enough?' My advice would be to just focus on the love. Focus on what really brings you the joy. And that will help you improve. It's a marathon; it's not a sprint. You have to put in the time. It's years and years. But make sure you keep that joy. And if you do what you love to do, you're going to do it and then you're going to get better because you're going to enjoy it. Just kind of stay true to who you are. Don't try to copy someone because unless you're being true to yourself, your best stuff is not going to come out. So just don't give up. And just keep thinking about what you love to do instead of trying to chase certain things. Don't get discouraged by how hard it may seem or how daunting it is. It's just, it's one step at a time. And if you keep going and don't give up, you'll get where you want to be.
[music]

[42:25] Story prompt: Picture your own tale

So with all this good advice in hand, it's time to create your own tale. I'm not going to give you a story opening as a prompt today. Instead, I'm going to urge you to tell a story with images. Start with a pencil. Or a camera. Or a computer. Or fabric and thread. Or a pile of advertisements and a pair of scissors. Or a junk drawer and a bottle of glue. Picture books have been created with the contents of

a veggie drawer, so think outside the pencil case. There are a thousand ways to make meaning with images. Try one for fun.

Your prompt this week is just a suggestion to picture a Halloween story. A comic or photostory, or any kind of seasonal narrative with a visual element. It could be a love story told in texts and candy wrappers. A spooky story told in doodles and prose. Assembly instructions on how to build your own monster. An illustrated spellbook. A nightmare in watercolours. A postcard exchange between Dracula and the vampires from Twilight – okay, I really want to read that one. Dracula's going to have a lot to say to those glamourous kis. Please write that. In whatever medium takes your fancy. Follow the advice of today's guest artists and have fun creating a story in images. Follow the joy.

[music]

[43:40] Thanks and coming up on the podcast

And that's all for today's show. Next week, there will be a second special episode of Cabin Tales, Episode XX: "The Halloween Special," featuring spooky stories and weird tales from student writers, with no interviews at all. You'll hear funny stories, serious stories, new takes on classic scares and totally original tales, all in time for Halloween. That's coming up next week.

I want to thank today's guests: Christine Tripp, Katherine Battersby, Peggy Collins, Farida Zaman, and Chris Jones. I'll post the full interviews with these author-illustrators on the podcast in the winter. For now, you can find out more about all of these artists, and you can see an example of their work and find links to their websites, in the shownotes for this episode. You'll find a full transcript of the episode on the website at CabinTales.ca. You can follow the blog to receive

notifications of new episodes. Or subscribe to the podcast on iTunes or Podbean or most streaming services.

I hope you enjoyed today's show, and you're now inspired to write and illustrate your own tale.

I'm Catherine Austen. Thanks for listening.

[crickets]