

GRADES
5+

LEARN TO ILLUSTRATE

Children's Book
Illustrations



TABLE OF CONTENTS



■ LESSON 1	What Do Children's Book Illustrators Do?	5
■ LESSON 2	Creating Characters That Come to Life	13
■ LESSON 3	Start with a Shape.....	22
■ LESSON 4	Meet Your Main Character	29
■ LESSON 5	Keeping Your Character Consistent.....	35
■ LESSON 6	Character Turnarounds.....	42
■ LESSON 7	Creating Scenes That Tell a Story	50
■ LESSON 8	Building Your Character's World.....	56
■ LESSON 9	Mapping Out Your Story.....	64
■ LESSON 10	Details That Make the Story Shine.....	70
■ LESSON 11	The Final Spread: Bringing It All Together	78
■ LESSON 12	Many Ways to Make Illustrations	90
■ BONUS LESSON		96



LESSON 1

What Do Children's Book Illustrators Do?

Illustrators are artists who bring the words of a story to life with drawings and paintings. They help the readers see what's happening in the story, whether it be about a dancing rabbit, a sneaky pirate, or a fantasy forest.

Some illustrators use traditional tools like pencils and paints, while others use digital tools like tablets or computers. Many illustrators use a mixture of the two. No matter which tools they use, their job is to make the story fun, exciting, and easy to understand through pictures.



HELLO THERE!

ABOUT THE ARTIST

I'm Shannon, a children's book illustrator who loves bringing characters to life! You might have seen my illustrations in the *Billy and Ella Mysteries* series or the *Little Hearts and Hands Big Book of Science Stories* published by The Good and the Beautiful.

I've known since I was very young that I wanted a career in art. That passion led me to earn my bachelor's degree in art education from the University of Akron. Now I get to spend my days doing what I love most: creating characters and bringing stories to life through illustration. When I'm not drawing, you can usually find me listening to music, reading a good mystery novel, or enjoying the beautiful outdoors of Ohio.



HOW TO USE THIS COURSE

WELCOME TO THE ART OF THE STORY: CHILDREN'S BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS

Have you ever looked at pictures in a storybook and thought, “I want to draw pictures like that”? If so, you’re in the right place! In this art course, we’re going to explore what it’s like to be a children’s book illustrator, someone who helps bring stories to life through art. After all, somebody has to draw characters like chickens wearing roller skates, rabbits with secret superhero identities, or even kid scientists inventing chocolate-flavored broccoli. In this course, that somebody will be you!

You’ll dream up a variety of characters, then choose one to develop, giving them a personality and figuring out how they would move, smile, frown, or even do a little line dance.

Characters need places to live! In this course you’ll learn about creating settings that help tell stories through shapes, colors, and visual clues. Whether it be a castle made of cookies, a jungle full of monkeys, or an underwater city made entirely of seashells, your creativity is the only limit on the worlds that you can invent!

By the end of this course, you will have a finished full-spread illustration that looks like it belongs in a real children’s book.

Together we will . . .

Invent your own special character. From silly to serious, you’re in charge of their style.

Design your character’s world, whether it’s fantasy, reality, or something in between.

Use your art to tell the story and show emotion, action, and plot hints.

At the grand finale, transform all you’ve learned into professional-looking pages.



SKETCH STOPS

Every so often during the lessons, we will take a “Sketch Stop.” This is a short, guided drawing break where you will follow step-by-step instructions to create a complete character. It’s like a separate mini lesson, where you can build with simple shapes and lines to create a variety of fun characters.

When you finish this course, you’ll have more than a finished illustrated book spread. You’ll have the skills, ideas, and confidence to keep creating your own characters and stories whenever you want!



HOW DO ILLUSTRATORS WORK WITH AUTHORS AND EDITORS?



Illustrators don't usually work alone. They are part of a team that includes the author, who writes the story; the editor, who helps make sure all the words and pictures work well together; and the publisher, who helps organize and prepare the book to be shared.

Here's how the process usually goes:

1

The author writes the story.



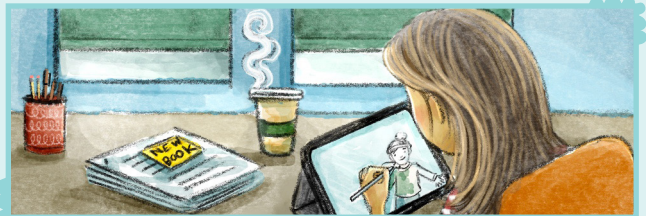
2

An editor, a publisher, or sometimes the author chooses an illustrator whose style matches the feel of the story.



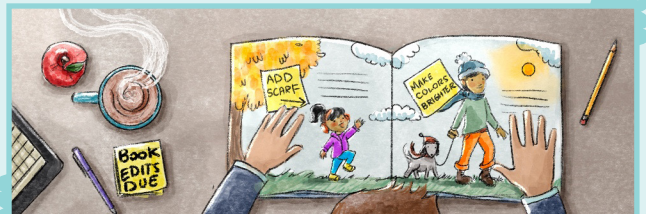
3

The illustrator reads the story and any notes from the team carefully, then starts sketching ideas for what the characters, settings, and scenes may look like.



4

The editor gives feedback along the way, making sure that the images support the story and match the author's vision. Finally, the publisher helps organize and prepare the book to be shared.



5

Working together, everyone makes the book the best it can be!



LET'S TALK SUPPLIES!

Before we dive into creating awesome characters and make-believe story scenes, let's talk about the art supplies you'll need. The good news is that nothing fancy is required.

Here's what you'll need for this course:

Drawing Tools

- **A regular #2/HB pencil:** It's also nice to have a mechanical pencil for creating fine lines, but it's optional.
- **A white eraser:** These don't smear as easily as other erasers. I like the brand Staedtler™. If you don't have a white eraser, a clean pink eraser will work as well.
- **A pencil sharpener**
- **A black pen or fine liner (Micron, Sharpie™, or gel pen):** Outlining your illustrations can make them pop.
- **A ruler for drawing straight lines:** I love using a small L-shaped ruler (called an L-square) for checking the correctness of the angles on my page, but a regular ruler will also work.
- **A sketchbook at least 5.5" x 8.5" or larger:** If possible, make sure the binding is on the side so that it mimics a real book layout.
- **Plain white printer paper:** When using pen or marker, putting an extra sheet of paper under your illustration can help prevent the ink from "bleeding" through.

Coloring Supplies

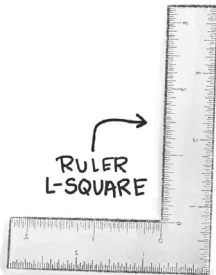
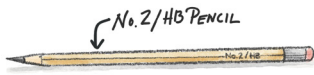
- **Colored pencils:** Prismacolor is great, but any brand will work. There are tons of fun ways to add color to your illustrations, but for this course, we are keeping it simple with colored pencils.

Books

- **Two illustrated storybooks of your choice that you enjoy:** These can be from your home collection or the library. Be sure the books have different illustrators. We will use these books later in this lesson to analyze the illustrations.

**Materials for continuing your children's book illustrations after you've finished this course (optional):*

- **A clipboard:** I like using these while drawing. That way, I can take my drawing anywhere and still have a hard surface to draw on. A desk or clean table works too!



SEARCH FOR SUPPLIES

Look at the image below to find and circle a few of the supplies from the previous page.



LESSON 2

Creating Characters That Come to Life

One of the most exciting parts of being a children's book illustrator is creating the characters in the story. Characters are the heart of the book. They laugh, cry, explore, and take readers on adventures. Today you get to learn about the best part: deciding what characters look like!

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CHARACTER?

A great character is more than cool clothes, crazy hair, or a big toothy grin—though those things definitely help! What really makes a character come to life is personality. You can show who they are by the way they stand, move, smile, or frown.

Is your character shy, avoiding eye contact, or are they outgoing and loud, standing with their hands on their hips? Maybe your character is always giggling or dancing around with excitement. All the details, big and small, will tell the story of your character.

In this lesson you will create your very own character from scratch. You'll decide what

makes them special and how to show their personality through their facial expressions, body language, clothing, and hairstyle. Let's get ready to bring your very own character to life!



VOCABULARY

Character Design: The process of creating the appearance, personality, and story of a character

Silhouette: The outline or shape of a character's body, helping a character stand out and be recognizable

Expression: The way a character's face shows emotion, such as surprise, happiness, sadness, or tiredness

Features: The visible parts of a character's face or body (eyes, nose, hands, ears, hair, etc.)

Stylized Character: A character that is drawn with unique or exaggerated features that are not realistic, such as giant eyes, a tiny body, or fun shapes to match their personality

Personality Traits: The character's behavior, attitude, thoughts, and feelings (shown with facial expressions, clothes, and actions)

Proportion: The size of one part of the body compared with another (like head to body)

Pose: The way a character is standing or sitting, showing how they feel or act

ACTIVITY: VOCAB MIX AND MATCH

Let's start with an activity that will review some important vocabulary terms. Read each vocabulary word on the left and draw a line to its definition on the right.

CHARACTER DESIGN

The outline or shape of a character's body, helping a character stand out and be recognizable

PERSONALITY TRAITS

The process of creating the appearance, personality, and story of a character

PROPORTION

The way a character's face shows emotion, such as surprise, happiness, sadness, or tiredness

POSE

The way a character is standing or sitting, showing how they feel or act

STYLIZED CHARACTER

The character's behavior, attitude, thoughts, and feelings (shown with facial expressions, clothes, and actions)

SILHOUETTE

The size of one part of the body compared with another (like head to body)

FEATURES

A character that is drawn with unique or exaggerated features that are not realistic, such as giant eyes, a tiny body, or fun shapes to match their personality

EXPRESSION

The visible parts of a character's face or body (eyes, nose, hands, ears, hair, etc.)

SKETCHBOOKS

Before we get much further in our course, I want to talk a little about keeping a sketchbook. Most great illustrators keep a sketchbook, using it not only for drawing illustrations, but also for exploring ideas, experimenting with characters, and collecting inspiration from the world around them. Your sketchbook doesn't have to be perfect. It's a place to try new things, make mistakes, and save ideas for later. A sketchbook is your own personal idea bank that you can look back on at any time for inspiration.

Here are some things you can keep in your sketchbook:

- Character doodles
- Practice drawings of character poses and expressions
- Page layouts and storyboards
- Quick story ideas
- Interesting shapes and patterns you find
- Art goals and reflections (for example, what you're proud of this week, what you want to improve, or a list of illustrators and books that inspire you)

Remember, there is no wrong way to use your sketchbook. It can be messy, neat, colorful, or super detailed. Your sketchbook is your personal creative space. The more you use it, the more your creative ideas and skills will grow.



PERSONALITY PROFILE: DESIGN YOUR CHARACTER



Our next activity is all about discovering who your character really is! You'll get to decide not only how they look, but also what kind of personality they have. Do they wear sparkly capes, muddy boots, or colorful socks? Are they always singing and dancing, or are they quiet and relaxed? To help you bring your character to life, you'll fill out a fun character questionnaire. It's like an interview that asks your character about their favorite things, biggest fears, secret talents, and more. By the time you finish, you'll know your character inside and out and be ready to sketch them to life! You'll get to develop your character more in future lessons.

Fill in the answers to the character questionnaire in the spaces provided. (Note: You will draw your character in a future lesson. Today you are just deciding who they are!)

CHARACTER BASICS

Name:

Age:

Species:
(human, animal, robot, etc.)

Does your character have a job or role in their world? (student, explorer, pet detective, ninja librarian, etc.)

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Height/Size:
(short, tall, tiny, gigantic, average, etc.)

Body shape:
(round, triangle-shaped, skinny, muscular, fluffy, etc.)

Eye shape and color:

Hairstyle, hair color, and skin color:

Do they have special features?
(freckles, tail, wings, glasses, crutches, etc.)

CLOTHING & ACCESSORIES

What kind of clothes do they wear most of the time?

What items do they always carry or wear?
(backpack, hat, tool, toy, etc.)

PERSONALITY & EMOTIONS

Three personality traits: (curious, brave, shy, sneaky, kind, etc.)

1.

One thing that makes them happy:

2.

One thing that annoys or scares them:

3.

What emotion do they show most often on their face?

BACKGROUND & STORY

Where does your character live?

What is a special talent they have?

Who are their friends, family, or pets?

Great job creating your character's personality and backstory! Before you get to draw your character in Lesson 4, though, we need to talk about one of the most important parts of designing characters, and that's stylization!

What does **stylization** mean? It means your drawing doesn't have to look realistic. In children's books stylized characters are often . . .

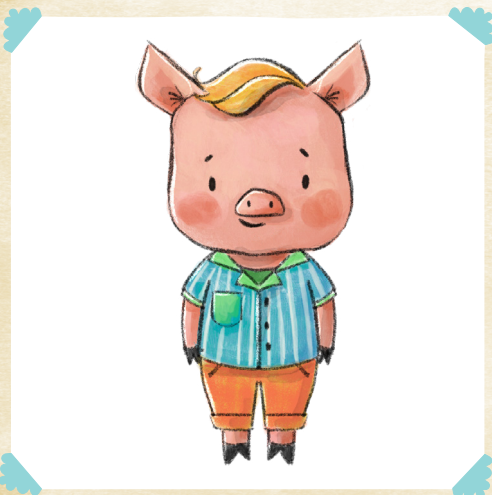
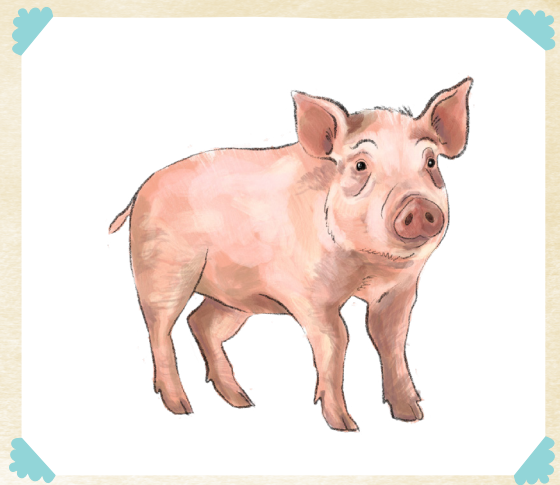
- Exaggerated (giant heads, tiny bodies, huge eyes)

- Simplified (dots for eyes and simple lines for mouth and nose)

- Creative (square heads, extra-bendable arms and legs, unrealistic color choices)

REALISTIC CHARACTER

- Looks like a real character or animal
- Has natural proportions and shading
- Tries to match the real world
- Uses real anatomy



STYLIZED CHARACTER

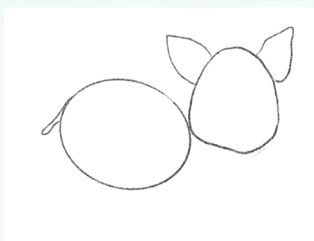
- Looks cartoonish, exaggerated, or simplified
- May have a big head, tiny feet, or wild colors
- Follows the illustrator's own creative rules



Here we are at our second Sketch Stop! We will be drawing both a realistic and a stylized pig. Remember to sketch lightly so you can erase your extra lines as you go.

- 1 ☐ Begin by drawing an oval that will be the body. Add a small tail shape on the upper-left side.

- ☐ On the right side, draw a head shape with two triangle-shaped ears standing up.



- 2 ☐ Draw the insides of the ears, followed by two dots for eyes and a pig-nose shape with two nostrils.

- ☐ Draw down from the right side of the head to begin the front leg. Do the same with the back leg on the other side.

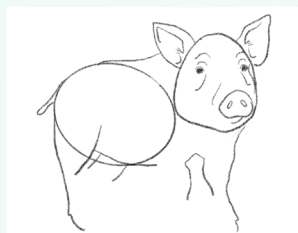


- ☐ Draw a line from the back of the head to the top of the body circle to create the back.

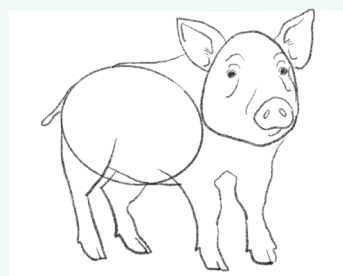
- 3 ☐ Draw lines around the eyes for wrinkles. Add a chin below the nose.

- ☐ Draw an upside-down U shape that will separate the front legs.

- ☐ Mimic the lines at the bottom of the oval to create the bottom of the abdomen and the separation of the back legs.

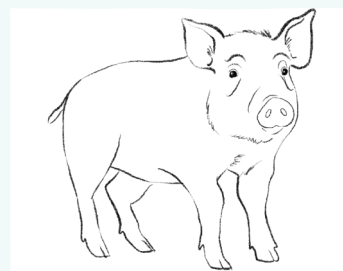


- 4 ☐ Finish drawing the legs by mimicking the lines in the picture and adding a hoof at the bottom of each leg.

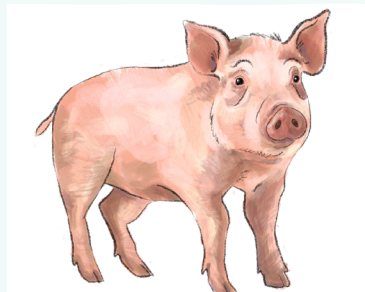


- 5 ☐ Begin erasing circles so your pig starts to look more realistic.

- ☐ Refine the features by adding small tufts of hair around the top of the head, jaw, chest, and legs.



- 6 ☐ Color your realistic pig, outline it with a black pen, and add shadows for depth.



DRAW HERE!

LESSON 8

Building Your Character's World

You've designed your character and learned how to keep them looking like themselves, no matter which way they turn. You've also practiced giving them motion, energy, and personality! It's now time to take the next big step in the creative process of children's book illustration by putting your character in a story and creating the world it takes place in!

Below are some key vocabulary words that will help you when building a world and a story for your character.

VOCABULARY

Setting

The place and time where the story happens

Storyline

The main idea of what happens in your story, from start to finish

Introduction

The start of your story, where you introduce your character and setting

Conflict

A problem or challenge your character faces that moves the story forward

Resolution

The part where the story wraps up and comes together to make sense

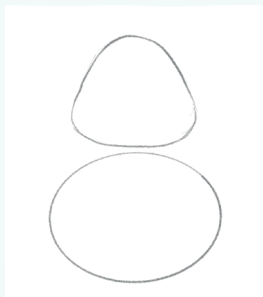
*Your skills are like seeds:
The more you practice,
the more they grow!*



Welcome to our eighth Sketch Stop! Today you will draw a mouse. Remember to sketch lightly so you can erase your extra lines as you go.

1

- ☐ Draw a mushroom shape for the head.
- ☐ Draw an oval for the belly.



2

- ☐ Connect the head shape to the body with two lines that form a neck and the beginnings of the arms.
- ☐ Add U shapes that will be hands.
- ☐ Add two dots for eyes.
- ☐ Add ears to the top of the head.



3

- ☐ Add C shapes for the inside of the ears.
- ☐ Add a small nose and a mouth.
- ☐ Connect the head and the belly on the outside to form the shoulders.
- ☐ Draw two ovals for feet at the bottom of the belly.



4

- ☐ Add fur tufts to the ears, whiskers on the face, and a U shape to each foot to make toes and to each hand to make fingers.
- ☐ Draw a triangle shape between the paws for the cheese. Don't forget to add the line that makes it appear three-dimensional.



5



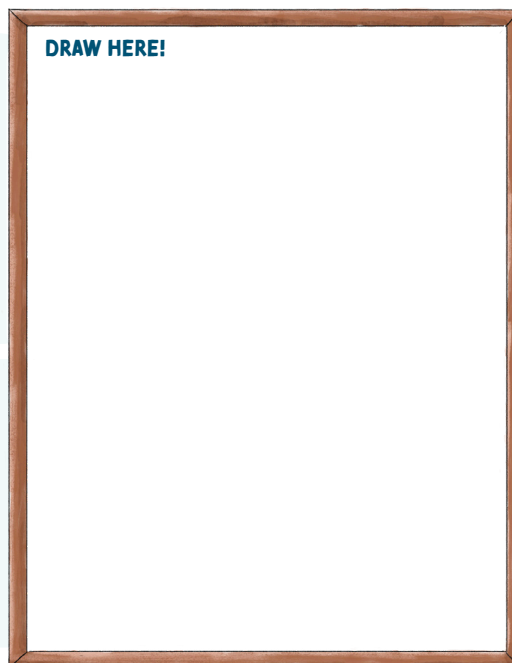
- ☐ Erase any leftover sketch lines.
- ☐ Draw an oval around the nose and mouth.
- ☐ Add a long tail.
- ☐ Draw circles on the cheese.

6

- ☐ Bring your mouse to life with pen and color.



DRAW HERE!



THE PARTS OF A STORY

Most picture book stories (even short ones) are made of three important parts:

A BEGINNING

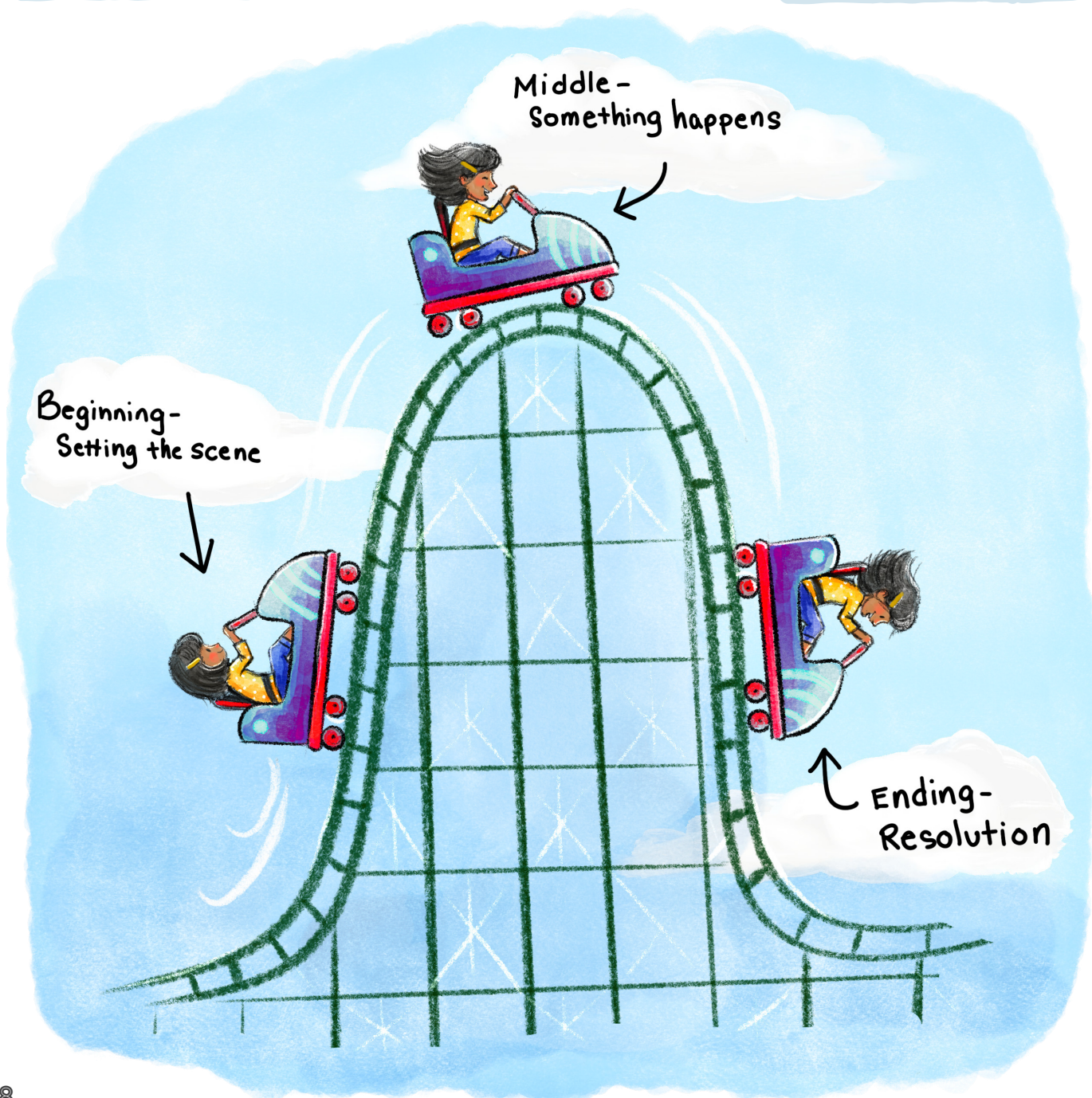
This is also called the **introduction**, where you introduce your character and show what they're doing. It sets up the day, mood, and where the story is taking place.

A MIDDLE

This is where the **conflict**—something surprising or challenging—happens. It doesn't have to be a grand moment, just something that changes what your character planned to do.

AN ENDING

This is where your character solves the problem, reacts to it, or discovers something new. The **conclusion** wraps up the story in a clear and meaningful way.



Now it's time to personalize a short story to use for your story spreads. Below you will find three short story starters to choose from, with each one having a beginning, a middle, and an end. After reading through all three stories, choose the one you like the most. Simply insert your character's name and choose a pronoun where indicated. Remember—use your imagination! Think about how your unique character might fit into these stories.

STORY STARTER 1: THE GIFT

your character's name raced along the beach, kicking his/her new soccer ball through the sand. Suddenly, he/she remembered it was almost time to leave for Grandma's super surprise birthday party.

"Oh no!" your character's name shouted. "I forgot to get a gift for Grandma's super surprise birthday party!"

Just then, he/she remembered the large bucket of shells he/she had collected earlier in the day. your character's name reached in and pulled out a large pink shell that he/she knew Grandma would absolutely love to receive as a gift!

STORY STARTER 2: A LUNCH ADVENTURE

your character's name carefully laid his/her sandwich down so he/she could spread his/her blanket out for lunch in the garden.

To his/her surprise, a sneaky squirrel grabbed the sandwich and dashed away. your character's name quickly chased after it, laughing and shouting, "Come back with my lunch!"

Finally, the squirrel dropped the sandwich before scampering up a tree. your character's name dusted it off and decided this was an awesome lunch adventure!

STORY STARTER 3: NICE CATCH!

your character's name had used his/her allowance to buy the tallest ice cream cone he'd/she'd ever seen. He/She held it proudly as he/she walked down the sidewalk.

A sudden gust of wind tilted his/her cone, sending the top scoop wobbling off. "No, no, no!" your character's name shouted as he/she stuck his/her arm out to catch the falling scoop.

To his/her relief, the scoop landed perfectly in the palm of his/her hand. your character's name laughed and plopped the scoop back on top of the cone like nothing had ever happened.

Welcome to our 14th Sketch Stop! Today you will draw an earthworm in a party hat with a balloon. Remember to sketch lightly so you can erase your extra lines as you go.



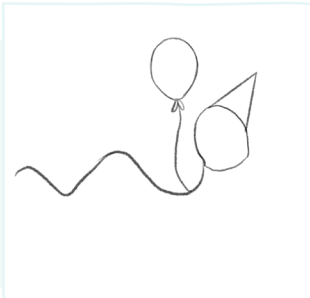
1



- ☐ Draw a head shape using an uneven circle shape on the right side of the box.
- ☐ Draw a second circle for the balloon to the left of and a little above the head.

2

- ☐ Attach a wavy line to the head. This is the beginning of the body.
- ☐ Next add a balloon tie and string to the balloon.
- ☐ Add a triangle shape to the top of the head.



3



- ☐ Now add the face by drawing two dots for eyes.
- ☐ Add a half circle to connect the ends of the triangle shape to form the bottom of the party hat. Add a bow to the left side of the face to show where the party hat is tied onto the head.
- ☐ Add ten curved lines spaced out below the wavy line. These will become the earthworm's segments.

DRAW HERE!

4

- ☐ Finish drawing the bottom of the body by adding a wavy line from the head to the end of the tail. Connect the segment lines to the new wavy line as you go.
- ☐ Add a mouth to the face and a pom-pom to the top of the party hat. Erase any sketch lines.



5



- ☐ Bring your earthworm to life with pen and color.
- ☐ Add a celebratory word next to the mouth.

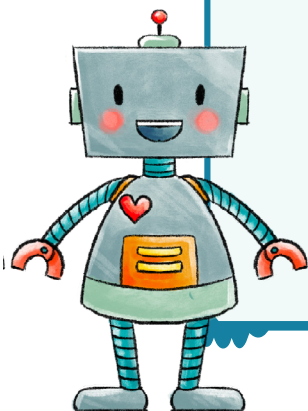


This lesson is different from the others because it can be done a little or a lot at a time; it's up to you! This is a chance for you to sharpen your skills and try out some more advanced Sketch Stops.

These Sketch Stops are meant to challenge you. Some might feel tricky at first, and that's okay. The goal is to practice and improve.

Try as many Sketch Stops as you'd like and skip any that don't interest you today. You can always come back to them later if you want. This bonus lesson is here to remind you that learning to illustrate doesn't stop when this course ends.

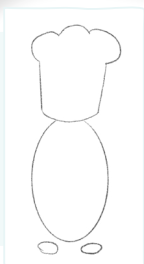
Have fun and enjoy the challenge!





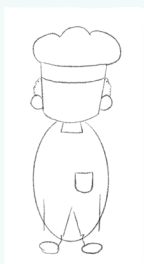
Remember to sketch lightly so you can erase your extra lines as you go.

1



- ☐ Draw a muffin shape that will be both the head and the hat.
- ☐ Draw an oval that will become the belly.
- ☐ Last, draw two small egg shapes under the oval that will become feet.

2



- ☐ Add a band to the hat. Add a wavy C shape that will be curly hair to each side of the bucket-shaped face. Below the curly hair on each side, add a second C shape that will be the ears.
- ☐ In the oval, add a half-square shape that will be the top of the apron. Add a U-shaped pocket on the right side. Draw an upside-down V shape that connects to the egg-shaped shoes to start the legs. Add a line on each side that will be the outsides of the legs.

3



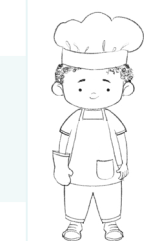
- ☐ Add lines for pleats to the hat above the band and hair below the band on the face. Add curves inside the ears.
- ☐ Inside the oval, finish the apron by drawing the straps at the top near the neck and adding a curved line to the bottom. Add arms to each side of the body. The arm on the left side should be wearing an oven mitt. Add two curved lines to the top part of each arm to form a short-sleeved shirt. Add cuffs to the bottom of the legs to form pants.
- ☐ Add shoes to the feet. Use the egg shapes as the toes section of the shoes and draw laces between the toes and the cuffs on the pants. Draw a curved line below the toes to form the sole of each shoe.

4

- ☐ Add dots for eyes with small lines for eyebrows above them. Draw a small line for a nose and a small curved line for a smile. Add a hand to the arm on the right.



5



- ☐ Add curls to the hair.
- ☐ Erase any extra lines.

6

- ☐ Bring your chef to life with color and shading.



DRAW HERE!

