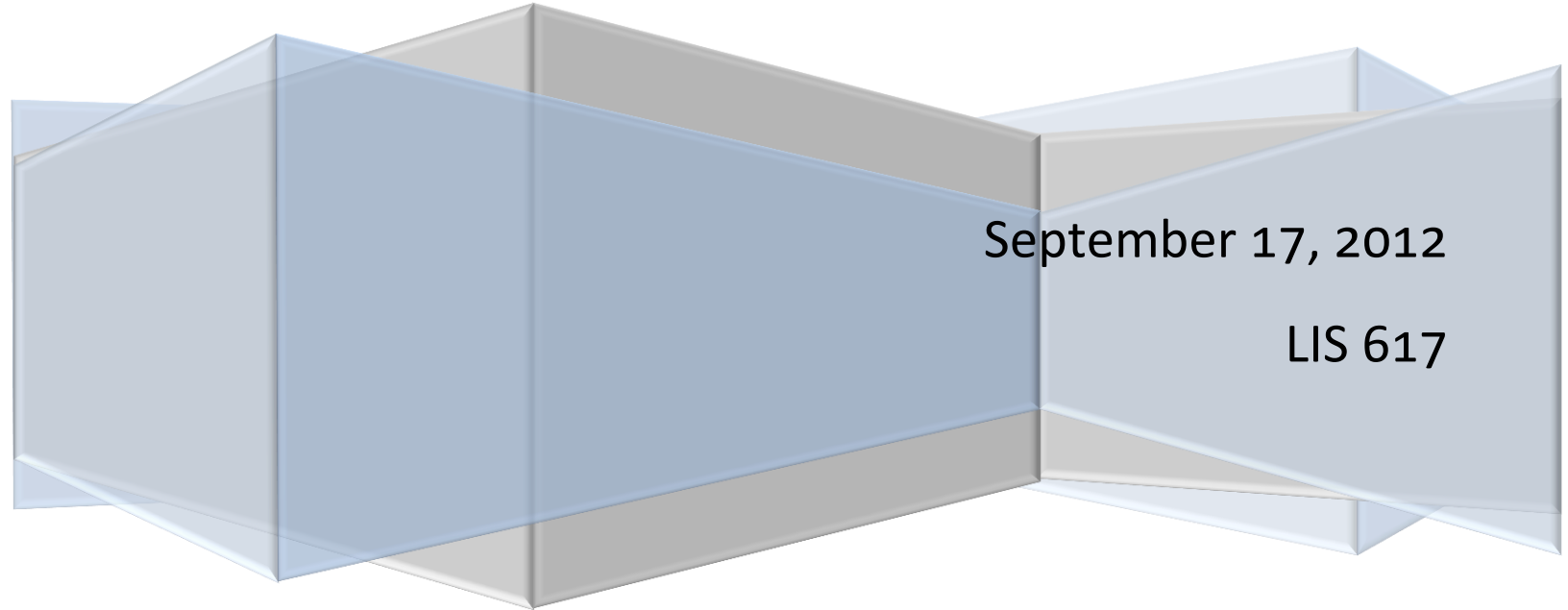


# Eric Carle

## An In-depth Illistrator Study

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LIS 617

Eric Carle is a world renowned illustrator of children's books. Known as the "pioneer of the novelty book," Carle's unique style of brightly colored collages has served him well as illustrator of over 70 books (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 52). Carle has received numerous recognitions and awards for many of his works over the years, both nationally and internationally as a result of his works having been translated into over 30 languages world-wide (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 52). The following study summarizes Carle's career and artistic style that has made him so distinctly known.

#### Biographic Information

Eric Carle was born in Syracuse, New York to German immigrants, Erich and Johanna Carle on June 25, 1929. Around the age of six, Carle's parents returned to Germany. His father was shortly thereafter sent off to war and was gone for eight years. Carle returned to the United States with his wife Dorothea Wohlenberg. They had two children: Cirsten and Rolf. Carle and his wife divorced after ten years of marriage. Carle later married Barbara Morrison in June, 1973. Carle and his wife currently lives in Northampton, Massachusetts (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 49).

#### Career

Carle's journey into art began with a father who wanted to be an artist and often drew for him at an early age (Mackenzie, 2003). Around the age of six, Carle's family moved from Syracuse, NY, to Stuttgart, Germany (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 52). In 1939, Carle's father was sent into war. His high school art teacher encouraged his artistic interests by "secretly introducing an unsophisticated boy of about

twelve to the beauty of abstract, modern, and expressionistic art” against Hitler’s forbiddance of its teaching (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 53). After high school, Carle entered the fine arts academy, Academie der bildenden Kunste in Stuttgart, Germany where he received “intensive training in graphic arts: (Eric Carle, 2006, pp. 49, 53). (Beneduce, 2003, p. 426) His first job was designing posters for the American information center in Stuttgart (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 53).

In 1952, Carle returned to the United States and began work for New York Times as a graphic designer (Beneduce, 2003, p. 426). During his time working as a graphic designer of advertisements, author Bill Martin, Jr. saw one of his illustrations and asked Carle to illustrate a story he had written (Mackenzie, 2003). The collaborative effort resulted in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* published in 1967.

Carle’s career of writing and illustrating his own works began in 1968 with the publication of *1,2,3 to the Zoo* followed by his most famous work, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* published in 1969 (Mackenzie, 2003). Currently, Carle has written and illustrated 65 of his own books and illustrated 31 books for other authors (Eric Carle, 2006, pp. 51-52).

Carle’s list of accomplishments for his work list is extensive. Some of his awards have been from such places as the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), New York Times, and American Library Association (ALA). Although Carle has not won a Caldecott Award for his illustrations, in 2003 he was awarded the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award by ALA honoring his books published in the United States which have made a substantial and lasting contribution to children’s literature over a period of years (American Library Association, 1997-2012). Additionally, Carle has won awards internationally. One such award, the Japan Picture Book Award for Lifetime Achievement, Carle won in 2000 (Carle).

## Artistic Style and Medium

Carle is “immediately recognizable” for his “distinctive artistic style” (Mackenzie, 2003). His consistent use of bright color collage created from his own creatively acrylic painted tissue paper works well for his own text or that of others. Carle first paints the tissue paper, using several layers of different colors and color combinations, then he “speckles, squiggles or even stamps it with carpet remnants to add texture and interest to his illustrations” (Glassman, 1994).

Carle is also known as a “pioneer of the novelty book” do to his “innovative” ways of creating books that “bridge the gap between touchable book and readable toy” (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 52). Carle adds such things as computer chips which provide chirping cricket sounds (*The Very Quiet Cricket*) or squeaking duck sounds (*10 Little Rubber Ducks*), and flashing lights (*The Very Lonely Firefly*). In addition to these audio and visual accessories, Carle uses gradually increasing page sizes (*The Grouchy Ladybug*), split pages (*My Very First Book* series), flaps (*The Grouchy Ladybug*), wholes in pages (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*), and pull tabs (*The Honeybee and the Robber*) in his picture books to make them the novelty “from toy to book, from plaything, from the touching to the understanding” (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 53), what Carle himself describes as “half toy, half book” (Glassman, 1994).

## Design Elements

Through his use of collage, Carle exhibits “large, bold, brilliant colors and crisp forms” (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 53). His illustrations are “lavish and expressive” (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 54). The following briefly describes how Carle uses the different design elements in his works.

## Color

Through his vivid use of color, Carle creates his images in collage style. By varying the color's value and texture, Carle is able to create definition. For example, his brown bear *from Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* is made up of sections (back end and one leg, shoulders and one front leg, each of the other legs, the head, face, ears, and toes). Brown Bear's body is all brown, but by using different colored tissue paper with varying textural design, the bear has character, depth, and texture. This technique of color usage is carried throughout Carle's works.

## Line

One way Carle utilizes the design element of line is in creating the collage images. According to Takeshi Matsumoto, "Lines made with the cutting knife are much sharper and clearer than any drawn by pen or brush," this makes each area of color in Carle's works more clearly defined, giving keen, precise images (Matsumoto, 1996, p. 50).

## Shape

Carle has the ability to "compress a very complex idea into a simple, direct image [that] even a very small child can grasp his meaning instantly" (Beneduce, 2003, p. 45). Carle's images are created out of uniquely colored and shaped pieces of tissue paper. The varying size and shape of the individual pieces gives each person, animal, tree, et cetera, its own uniqueness while still representing and resembling the very nature of the person, animal, etc.

## Composition (design principles)

Carle varied composition throughout *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. According to Carle's editor, Ann Beneduce, "In the opening spread, showing the egg on a leaf by the light of the moon, he has used

almost the entire page, 'bleeding' (without margins) on three sides. The next spread, by contrast, is strongly stylized, with the tiny caterpillar and the enormous, smiling sun. On the next spread, yet more surprises appear: the cutoff pages with die-cut holes" (Beneduce, 2003, p. 42). Yet, surprisingly, the caterpillar did not grow bigger as he ate until the end. Instead, the quantity of food caterpillar eats increases.

However, when illustrating other books, such as Bill Martin, Jr.'s *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?*, Carle repeats page composition of one animal centered between a two-page spread until the end when the text shows children. At that point, Carle illustrates children covering the two page spread. Carle's ability to change composition in his illustrations that complement the text shows his great detail unity within the entire work.

## Conclusion

Beneduce states that when comparing Carle's recent works to his earlier books, there is a "vast difference, a deepening and enrichment in his handling of textures and images; yet each one is unmistakably Eric Carle's" (Beneduce, 2003, p. 45). Beneduce's assessment suggests that Carle's illustrative style has continued to develop over the more than four decades of his illustrative career without jeopardizing his distinctive and highly recognizable work.

It is clear that Carle is able to bring "fun, nonsense, color, and surprise" into his books while at the same time presenting an opportunity to learn (Eric Carle, 2006, p. 53). It is his artistic style and technique that draw readers to pick up his books.

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