



# Windows into Illustration: Sarah McIntyre

Article Author:

[Sarah McIntyre](#) [1]

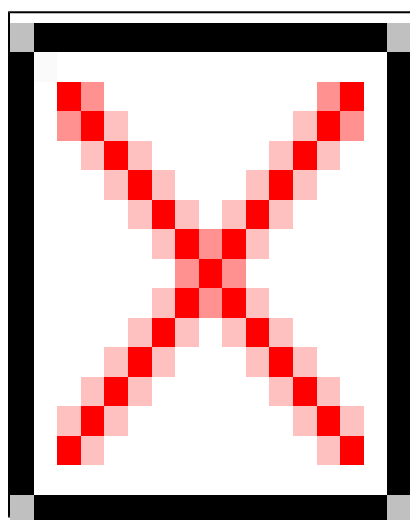
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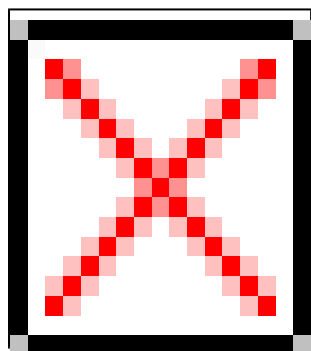
Windows into Illustration

Byline:

**Windows into Illustration:** our cover artist **Sarah McIntyre**

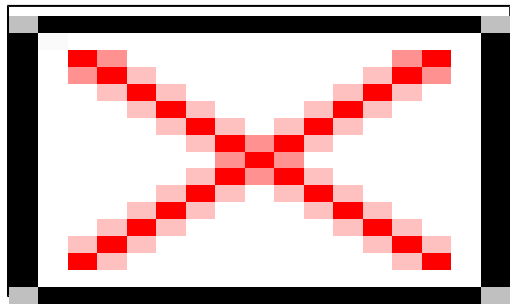


Sarah McIntyre first studied Russian Literature at university in the USA, and ten years later went on to do an MA in Illustration at Camberwell art college. While she started out illustrating other people's picture book texts, she learned that she could draw whatever she wanted if she wrote the stories herself, so she did; her picture books include **There's a Shark in the Bath**, **The New Neighbours** and **Dinosaur Firefighters**. In 2015 she and James Mayhew started up the **Pictures Mean Business** campaign, showing how everyone benefits when illustrators are credited properly for their work. Here she explains the thinking and technique behind the illustrations in her new book **Grumpycorn**.



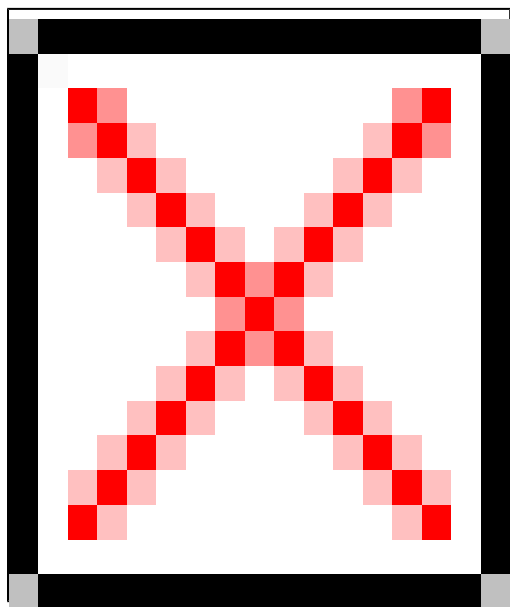
I sometimes paint my illustrations on watercolour paper, and sometimes work mixing ink or pencil line drawings with digital colouring. But when I set out to illustrate my latest picture book **Grumpycorn**, I'd just come off of working on **The New Neighbours**, which involved a lot of digital work. I liked the effect I got in Photoshop, but I was tired of scanning and staring at a computer screen. So with **Grumpycorn**, I decided I wanted to do something entirely with real paint, and push my painting skills in a new direction. Here's the book's back endpapers, when I'd finished all the other

pictures, got a grip on the technique, and could relax into making one last lavish spread.

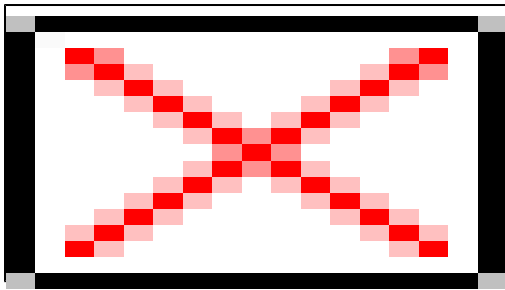


A lot of my earlier work (such as **Dinosaur Firefighters**) relied very heavily on black outlines, painted in, much like a colouring book. Not that there's anything wrong with this, but **Grumpycorn** features a lot of underwater scenes, and I wanted to capture the magic light effects you get when sun pierces the water's surface in rays. There were two artists in particular who inspired me: an old Russian master named Arkhip Lentulov, and a current colleague, Jonathan Edwards (aka 'Jontofski'). Both artists are very comfortable with colours bumping up against each other in beautiful kaleidoscopes and patchworks. Studying Lentulov's work (way back when I was doing my Russian degree) helped me see how superimposing compositional lines on the colours could give added movement and rhythm to a picture; every time I'd hit a compositional line, I'd change colour. It was quite a tricky way of working, making sure the coloured inks dried and didn't bleed into each other at the edges; I was constantly blasting my hairdryer in big swirling motions over the paper.

The subject matter makes me smile. These little seahorses never appear in the text, but they watch the story unfold, like younger siblings watching their older brothers and sisters play. You think the story has finished, but there's one more wordless little episode, where you can see the seahorses have taken in everything that's happened and are copying it, and reenacting it, like a play. You can spot the sea horse with the shell on its head, who's pretending to be Unicorn. I like this little window into a parallel world that the main characters in the story never get to see; hopefully it makes the reader extra special because you get a glimpse.



The timbers in the water are the stilts that hold up Unicorn's writing cottage; that's inspired by similar structures I saw in Seldovia, Alaska, way down the Kenai Peninsula. My uncle has a family fishing cottage out there, and I love the way the whole waterfront area near his house is propped up on these logs and forms a beautiful sort of pattern on the lower level below the line of the houses. I dedicated the book to my uncle, aunt, the people of Seldovia, and an illustrator who lives out there, named Valisa Higman. She works from a stilt cottage much like Unicorn's, and she's visited by all sorts of wonderful sea life, including three sea otters that she's named. It's wonderfully magical, this whole maritime setting, and I hope my book's managed to capture a bit of this magic.



**Grumpycorn** is published by Scholastic UK, 978-1407180830, £6.99 pbk

Visit [Sarah's website](#) [3] for free book-related resources

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