

Fall 2023

Highlighter

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic Journal

E m o t i o n s



SCBWI Mid-Atlantic

Highlighter

Fall 2023 // Emotions

Thank you to this issue's contributors

Cover illustration: **Dagmar Smith**, dagmarsmithart.com

Table of contents background illustration: **Cynthia Cliff**, cynthiaciff.com

Letter from the RAs: **Erin Teagan**, erinteagan.com; **Valerie Patterson**, valerieopatterson.com

Meet a Writer/Illustrator: **Tyler Charlton**, tylercharlton.com

"Writing Emotion": **Valerie Patterson**, valerieopatterson.com

"Emotional Story Building": **Denise Taranov**, denisetaranov.com

"Emotion in Illustration": **Mimi Simon**, mimisimon.com

Mood board:

Book excerpts: **Jen Fier Jasinski**, jenfierjasinski.com, MY PIANO; **Barbara Carney-Coston**, barbaracarneycoston.com, TO THE COPPER COUNTRY—MIHAELA'S JOURNEY

Illustrations: **Carina Santillan** ("Mermaid" illustration), carinasantillan.com; **Martin Saavedra** ("Faces" illustration), mtnsvd.com

The *Highlighter* is a quarterly journal published by the Mid-Atlantic Region (DC/Virginia) of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

For more information on our region, see <https://www.scbwi.org/regions/midatlantic>

Highlighter journal team

Denise Taranov, Editor, content
Lauren Loucas, Layout editor
Korena Di Roma Howley,
Copyeditor

To see the full list of regional volunteers, visit <https://www.scbwi.org/regions/midatlantic/our-team>

Submissions

Are you interested in contributing an article, illustration, or other content to *Highlighter*? Please send your ideas and/or portfolio link to Denise Taranov at MidAtlanticHighlighter@gmail.com

Contributors retain copyright to their work; material can only be reused with their permission. Non-SCBWI resources are not endorsed or affiliated, just included in case they're of interest.

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic

Highlighter

Fall 2023 // Emotions

CONTENTS

- 1 **Letter from the RAs**
Mid-Atlantic Regional Advisors' column
- 2 **Meet a Writer/Illustrator**
Tyler Charlton
- 6 **"Writing Emotion"**
Learn techniques to invoke authentic emotions in your characters
- 10 **"Emotional Story Building"**
Design the reader's emotional journey to supercharge story impact
- 15 **"Emotion in Illustration"**
Capture emotion through composition, shape design, and color
- 19 **Resources**
A compilation of helpful things
- 21 **Get Connected**
Ways to collaborate and get involved
- 24 **Mood Board**
Inspiration board featuring work by Mid-Atlantic members





Building Bridges

Even though we write mostly on our laptops, the scent of new pencils and school supplies always makes us think of new beginnings. Fall is the perfect time to restart creative endeavors. And what better way than [Beltway to Bridges](#), the SCBWI Mid-Atlantic's yearlong program to help creators build confidence in their work and forge stronger connections within our regional community. Each season will highlight a new stop on the road trip. Fall is filled with craft intensives to boost our skills. In winter we'll burrow into in-person and virtual write-ins and draw-ins to help us stay motivated and create with a view toward breaking out in the spring with revision and submission prep. The culmination of the program will be a daylong, in-person event with editors and agents in April. While our journeys are individual in nature, we can encourage each other on our creative travels. We hope Beltways to Bridges meets you where you need it most.

The fall craft intensives have launched! On September 30, speakers Marcie Atkins, Debra Shumaker, Tracey Kyle, Joyana Peters, and Olga Herrera spoke on topics including strategies for writing in rhyme, creating book dummies, researching your nonfiction or historical fiction project, and outlining as a tool for novelists. The turnout in Reston was great and it was so nice to gather in person again! In [Charlottesville](#) (October 14), authors Anne Marie Pace and Edie Hemingway

talked about picture book language and creating characters in novels. In addition, webinar coordinator Maureen Egan hosted Ann McCallum Staats on October 10 in a program focused on published members: "[Vivacious and Fun: Upping Your Game with Virtual School Visits.](#)"

This fall also marks a new addition to our regional team, assistant regional advisor (ARA) Nicole Green. Nicole has been a key volunteer in our region for many years, first as a meet-up coordinator for an area of our region, then as PAL coordinator in 2020. Since then, Nicole has become a trusted part of the Mid-Atlantic team and has created a closer community for our PAL members. We are thrilled she has taken on this new role in our region.

We hope to see you at an event this fall. In the meantime, keep moving on your creative journey. One step at a time.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin".

Erin Teagan
Co-Regional Advisor
midatlantic-ra@scbwi.org

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Val".

Valerie Patterson
Co-Regional Advisor
midatlantic-ra2@scbwi.org

Tyler Charlton



The Brutality of Failure

by Tyler Charlton

What's funny to me is that I'm an author-illustrator, and I loathed creative writing as a kid. Ugh. It was the worst. But I drew all the time. That's something one of my elementary school teachers remembers about me. I never took it seriously until I finished college.

After serving four years in the Army, I was ready to be a serious college student. I studied history and philosophy and, in the process, I picked up a habit of introspection, self-assessment, and journaling from my cohort and professors. In my last semester I took a drawing class. My art professor combined the discipline of drawing with a thoughtful personal aspect I had never experienced, and it nourished me and fueled the creativity I had been missing. I wanted more. So I pieced together an illustration education after graduation and pursued editorial illustration as a career.

The Darkness

Things didn't work out like I had hoped. I spent years creating portfolio piece after portfolio piece and entering illustration competitions, looking for encouragement and validation. I never really found my artistic voice in editorial illustration, and I lost my confidence.

Adding to that, I was suddenly dealt serious personal trauma, and it felt like everything was over. I decided to give up. And then something surprising happened. I got an email from an art director asking me to illustrate a magazine cover. I was paid well, and the jobs kept coming. I was able to grow as an artist and as a professional illustrator while I was dealing with the turmoil in my life.

Eventually the chaos settled, and I began to get more clients. I was experimenting and searching more—taking more chances. However, I still didn't feel like I had found my voice. After our third child was born, I took a long sabbatical from illustration. But I kept drawing and experimenting. And here's something

www.tylercharlton.com

 @tylercharltonart

Favorite resources

- 3 Point Perspective podcast from SVSLearn.com
- [The Illustration Department podcast](#) with Giuseppe Castellano
- [First Draft with Sarah Enni](#) podcast
- THE WAR OF ART by Steven Pressfield
- [KidLit411](#) website by Elaine Kiely Kearns and Sylvia Liu

important—I taught myself to draw for “me.” Did I give up or was I taking a break? I wasn't sure. I was treasuring having survived the Darkness and enjoying life with my family.

Finding Joy

One evening, as I was reading one of my favorite picture books (THE DAY THE CRAYONS QUIT) to my toddler son, I asked myself why I wasn't “doing something like this.” I love that book. I began seeking out all the information I could on getting illustration work in children's publishing. And I began studying picture books. It was a pivotal moment for me when I got a one-on-one consultation with Giuseppe Castellano at the Illustration Department. Who better to steer me in the right direction than a former art director in children's publishing? I find it incredible that this resource exists.

I became reacquainted with my childhood influences, and everything finally clicked. I found my voice. I finally learned how to draw for “me”—remember that?

Meet a Writer/Illustrator

(continued)

And so excited was I to be working on stories that I would wake up earlier than early to do it. The first postcard I sent out to publishers got an immediate response from a senior editor at a "dream client." That never happened to me before. It was my first sign that the process was working.

I joined SCBWI and went to the Mid-Atlantic conference. I made a friend. I gained confidence. I loved it. I signed up for the following midwinter conference in New York. In the meantime, I researched and queried three agents. I got one "pass," and two didn't respond. I kept working on my portfolio and on my story ideas.

Now, I've struggled my whole life with what feels like depression, and it intensified after that personal trauma I mentioned earlier. It was during one low point that I recognized some patterns in the experience. It felt like being washed away in an unexpected wave. I couldn't stop it and I couldn't find which way was up. I drew a picture of a boy tumbling and it made me happy to finally have a way to think about it and a way to communicate it. I turned this sketch into an illustration and put it in my portfolio for the showcase at the New York conference. I also used it as my postcard. My agent found that postcard at the showcase, offered me representation, and worked with me to develop my story for the boy in the wave.



Sketch of a boy tumbling that led to THE WAVE

I reflect on this journey often. Was it tenacity and perseverance or stubbornness and poor planning? Luck? All of the above? Could I have shortened the process?

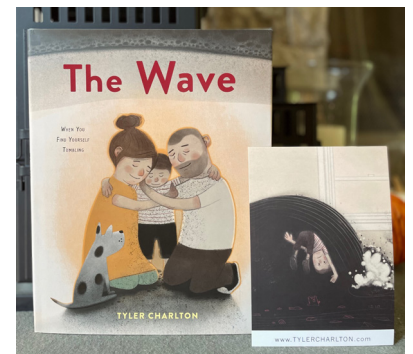
Timing—things didn't work out how I wanted or when I wanted. My process unexpectedly redirected my efforts, and I explored new and unconsidered territory. For me, it was the move to children's

Tyler Charlton



publishing after years of failure and frustration in the editorial world. My faith and my habit of introspection, self-assessment, prayer, and journaling both guided and carried me through the brutality of failure and despair to eventual success. Though I tumbled in wave after wave, it didn't last and I came out better.

My debut picture book, *THE WAVE*, was published by Roaring Brook Press in August and was just selected for the Original Art show this fall at the Society of Illustrators in New York. I love making picture books and making emotional connections with the reader/viewer. I delight in the process, the challenges, and the relationships. I finally feel like I've found my creative home.



THE WAVE picture book next to the "tumbling boy" illustrator promo postcard

What Helped Me?

- Exploring and experimenting
- Creating for "me"
- Making my childhood influences my foundation
- Taking time to self-assess
- Searching for where I find joy, internally, and not external validation alone
- Accepting that I will have moments of doubt and despair
- Looking outside of what I thought I wanted

My hope is that some of you can learn from my failures and victories, and if you find me at a conference or event, I'll eagerly chat with you about our journeys and what we've learned.

Meet a Writer/Illustrator

(continued)

Tyler Charlton



Self-portrait



Favorite tool

Mechanical pencil on paper and iPad Pro with Procreate

What inspires me

My childhood. My children. Strong emotions. The familiar path of suffering, struggle, and victory. The nature of love. All you clever creators out there.

Design influences

Edward Gorey. Richard Scarry. Hergé's Tintin. Mark English.

Favorite things to illustrate

Tree stumps. Rocks. Water. Bold shapes. Value patterns. Concepts. Universal experiences.

What I'd like to explore in the coming year

I've been learning the role of author-illustrator in post-publication and I'm starting to think about the journey my readers take from book to book and what stories I want to explore. Writing is newer for me so I'm thirsty to learn more and develop how my pictures and words work together. //H//

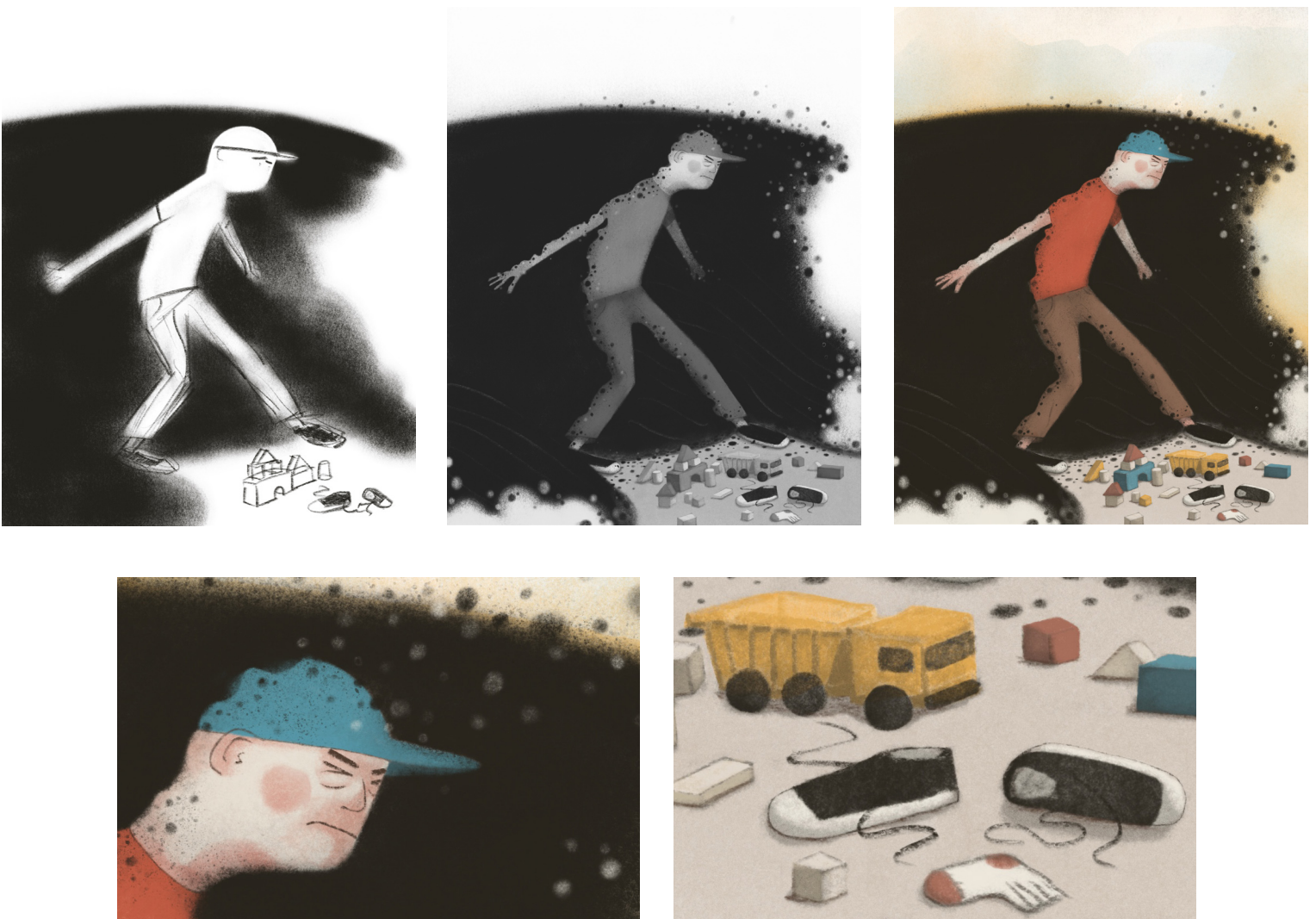
Meet a Writer/Illustrator

(continued)

Tyler Charlton



A peek into the process



Writing Emotion

by Valerie O. Patterson

Happy. Sad. Angry. Desperate.

As writers we've probably all struggled to convey emotion on the page. We've winced when we find telling words or clichéd expressions in our draft manuscripts. They fail to evince real emotional resonance. They fall flat.

In *STORY GENIUS* (Ten Speed Press, 2016), Lisa Cron says, "**Your goal isn't to tell us how [your characters] feel, so we know it intellectually; it's to put us in their skin as they struggle, which then evokes the same emotion in us.**" As soon as we name an emotion, we *think* about it rather than *feel* it. Instead, we need, as E.L. Doctorow says, to "evoke sensation in the reader, not in the fact that it is raining but the feeling of being rained upon." Literary agent Donald Maas challenges writers to ask themselves how we can "get readers to go on emotional journeys of their own" when reading about characters. The effective writer sparks a memory of an emotion in the reader that the reader then brings to the scene.

As readers, we know an author has succeeded when emotion resonates with us. Yet how do we successfully go about doing the same thing in our work? How do we show the protagonist's anxiety without clichéd sweaty palms? How do we show love without hearts doodled in the margin?

Get to Know Your Character (and Yourself)

Evoking emotion in your character is easier if you know your character well. Several books contain questionnaires for "interviewing" your character. These tools may be helpful, but don't think you

have to answer every question. Maybe you don't need to know every character's birthday, for example.

Critically, in addition to considering questions that focus on the *outside* of the character—height, hair color, type of clothing—consider the questions that get at the *internal* makeup of the character. In *WIRED FOR STORY* (Ten Speed Press, 2012), Lisa Cron says, "**Here is the secret: you are looking only for information that pertains to the story you're telling.**" She believes that when the writer is preparing the protagonist's bio, that bio should focus on two main things: "[T]he event in his past that keeps him from achieving his goal; and the inception of his desire for the goal itself. Sometimes they are one and the same." The actual past event may not ever appear on the page, but the emotional connection to it underpins the character's present actions because you "the writer understood it so clearly that you were able to weave it through everything the protagonist does." Its essence seeps into the story.

In addition to knowing your character well, you need to know yourself well. When your character experiences a particular emotion, how have you experienced that same emotion in the past? How can you use your reactions to strengthen the authenticity of your character's emotional response? The situations may not be the same, yet the emotional resonance can be. Your own connection to the emotion deepens its presence on the page.

Techniques to Evoke Emotion

Here are a few techniques to consider as you look to strengthen the emotional connection between the reader and the characters.

Writing Emotion

(continued)

1. Use setting to enhance emotion.

Descriptions of a farmhouse surrounded by dead cornstalks or a cinder-block house with pink shutters and plastic flamingos in the kiddie pool out front can evoke reactions in the reader immediately about the story mood and signal possible emotions. As Lisa Cron warns in *WIRED FOR STORY*, though, scenery in your writing “better be communicating something else” too. Those descriptions should “reveal character, tell us something about the plot, or share something metaphorically.” Otherwise, that sagging blue davenport in your character’s Florida room is just so much narrative clutter.

2. Be specific, not vague.

Authenticity is in the details. Use sensory details but restrict them to the *right* details. While using “tree” may be appropriate in some contexts, often being specific is better. Use “palm,” or “live oak,” or “fir,” for example. Naming a particular type of tree connotes different settings and can plant seeds of connection and emotion in the reader.

3. Harness the power of imagery.

Metaphors and similes can be a writer’s superpower. Kate DiCamillo infuses sunlight and darkness deftly throughout her novel *RAYMIE NIGHTINGALE* (Candlewick, 2016) to signal the emotional ups and downs of the characters. One example:

"Just then, the sun managed to come around the corner of Isabelle’s window and throw itself into a small square of light on the floor. It was very bright. It shimmered. It looked like the window to another universe."

Later, when Raymie, Louisiana, and Beverly break into an animal shelter at night to save a pet,

"[d]arkness seemed to roll out of it like a cloud. It had been dark in building 10 in the daylight. How dark would it be at night? There wasn’t even the light of a single swaying lightbulb."

The characters do not have to give voice to their fear and trepidation for the reader to feel those emotions.

4. Use symbols.

Symbols are a subset of metaphors that can serve as shortcuts to connect emotionally with the reader. Flags (connoting duty, honor, sacrifice), wedding rings (symbolizing love and commitment), and Valentine hearts (epitomizing romantic love) are examples of symbols that resonate with most readers in this country because of shared cultural meaning.

5. Imbue an object with emotion.

The “objective correlative,” a term of literary theory included by T.S. Eliot in an essay published in 1920, is described by him as follows: The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative;” in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately invoked.

While the theory applies broadly to include settings and events, it often is used with specific objects. In essence, an object embodies an emotion and can be used to carry that emotion through the character’s emotional arc.

For example, in a situation where a character is listening to a phone call that informs him that his mother has died, he could be noticing in detail an empty spider web in the corner of the windowpane as it sways in the late fall breeze. The character’s grief may never be stated in the scene but the narrow focus on the web draws the reader close emotionally. The spider web may appear again later in the narrative and spark a similar emotional response.

Karen Hess evokes grief brilliantly in her Newbery Medal winning book *OUT OF THE DUST* (Scholastic, 1997). After the death of her mother in an accidental fire, protagonist Billie-Jo is invited to see a rare

Writing Emotion

(continued)

cereus plant bloom one night, after which the plant will die. After seeing the bloom, Billie-Jo says:

"I couldn't watch at dawn,
when the flower,
touched by the first finger of morning
light,
wilted and died.
I couldn't watch
as the tender petals burned up in the
sun."

Hess powerfully conveys Billie-Jo's deep grief about her mother's death without making any reference to it.

In another example, a button box carved with a lotus flower in Linda Sue Park's novel *PRAIRIE LOTUS* (Clarion, 2020) carries great emotional depth. The box belonged to Hanna's deceased mother. Early in the book, Hanna opens the box. She

"...ran her finger over the carving on the lid, a simple five-pointed lotus. Mama's favorite flower. It was her trademark. She would use tiny lazy-daisy stitches to embroider a lotus in the lining of every garment she made, and she had taught Hanna how to do the same."

The button box and lotus motif appear throughout the novel, and at the end it is Hanna who embroiders her mother's lotus design into the lining of the clothing she now makes as a dressmaker. The lotus is a tangible emotional connection between Hanna and her mother, without Park having to say "loss," "grief," or "love." The reader feels it. Knowing also that the lotus is considered a symbol of resilience, beauty, and wisdom only adds to its effectiveness.

6. Try to avoid clichés.

The writer's goal is to be evocative and unique, but symbols, settings, and metaphors can easily fall vic-

tim to cliché. Weather may be effective in conveying mood, but tread carefully. There's a reason "dark and stormy night" is the basis for an annual contest for the most atrocious opening sentence of a novel.

In the first draft, though, when you're discovering your story and seeking creative flow, you may find that a cliché often is the first thing that comes to mind. Give yourself permission to use the cliché as a placeholder, knowing you'll need to go back and revise later to refine and deepen the emotional impact and eliminate the cliché.

7. Use dialogue to evoke emotion.

From the moment characters speak, they reveal character and emotion. From word choice to tone of voice, the dialogue conveys a character's emotional state even without taglines or nonverbal clues, as in this example:

"What are you upset about?"
"I'm not upset."
"Right. Really?"
"Really."
"Then let's go."
"Now?"
"Yes, now."
"Fine."

Dialogue coupled with physical reactions, internal thoughts, and vocal cues (such as volume and word choice) work together to intensify the emotional resonance.

8. Consider subtext.

If dialogue can cue the reader in to emotion, what about what is left unsaid by the character? Feelings may not be voiced out loud—indeed the character may deny the emotion to another character, but what is unsaid still finds expression. Body language doesn't lie. A hand over the mouth might connote insecurity regardless of how confident the character says he is.

Writing Emotion

(continued)

9. Use a memory to trigger emotions.

A short flashback can layer emotion onto and increase tension in the present-day storyline. The key is making the link clear and keeping the flashback to a minimum to avoid breaking the narrative flow. For example, a character could inhale the scent of boxwood in a park where she is arguing with her boyfriend. The scent sparks a memory of an unresolved rift with her grandmother, whose yard was filled with boxwood. The regret of that incident informs the character's current situation and deepens the reader's understanding of her emotional state.

10. When tensions are highest, consider paring your language.

Portraying the strongest human emotions—like love

or rage—can be the most difficult. To convey deep emotion, consider pruning details and language. Be spare. Sometimes the fewer words used, the deeper the emotion rendered.

Successful writers pull readers under the skin of their characters such that they feel those characters' emotions viscerally. The challenge is to mine our own pasts to bring authenticity to the page. Read widely and study how authors induce readers to connect with the character. Apply those techniques to your own work.

Whatever tools you use, though, remember you already have what you most need to connect readers to your characters: your own emotional landscape. //H//

Exercises to Try Out the Techniques

1. Identify a cliched expression for the common emotions below. Then, considering your protagonist, devise a unique way to convey the emotion. (Adapted from Mary Kole's *WRITING IRRESISTIBLE KIDLIT*. Writer's Digest Books, 2012):

- a. Anger
- b. Happiness
- c. Love
- d. Despair
- e. Jealousy

2. In your own WIP, consider whether there is an object that carries emotional weight. A good luck

charm? An acorn from a lost childhood home? Consider ways to use the object to convey an emotional thread through the narrative.

3. Look for a strong scene in a favorite novel. Underline metaphors or similes in red. Underline any symbols in blue, sensory details in yellow. Does one technique dominate?

(From Nancy Kress's book *CHARACTERS, EMOTION & VIEWPOINT: TECHNIQUES AND EXERCISES FOR CRAFTING DYNAMIC CHARACTERS AND EFFECTIVE VIEWPOINTS*)

Article sources:

- Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/art/objective-correlative>
- Brainy Quote: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/e_l_doctorow_390202
- Cron, Lisa. *STORY GENIUS: HOW TO USE BRAIN SCIENCE TO GO BEYOND OUTLINING AND WRITE A RIVETING NOVEL*. Ten Speed Press, 2016.
- Cron, Lisa. *WIRED FOR STORY: THE WRITER'S GUIDE TO USING BRAIN SCIENCE TO HOOK READERS FROM THE VERY FIRST SENTENCE*. Ten Speed Press, 2012.
- DiCamillo, Kate. *RAYMIE NIGHTINGALE*. Candlewick, 2016.
- Hess, Karen. *OUT OF THE DUST*. Scholastic, 1997.
- Kole, Mary. *WRITING IRRESISTIBLE KIDLIT: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CRAFTING FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULT AND MIDDLE GRADE READERS*. Writer's Digest Books, 2012.
- Kress, Nancy. *CHARACTERS, EMOTION & VIEWPOINT: TECHNIQUES AND EXERCISES FOR CRAFTING DYNAMIC CHARACTERS AND EFFECTIVE VIEWPOINTS*. Penguin Publishing, 2005.
- Maas, Donald. *THE EMOTIONAL CRAFT OF FICTION: HOW TO WRITE THE STORY BENEATH THE SURFACE*. Writer's Digest Books, 2016.
- Park, Linda Sue. *PRAIRIE LOTUS*. Clarion, 2020.

Emotional Story Building

by Denise Taranov

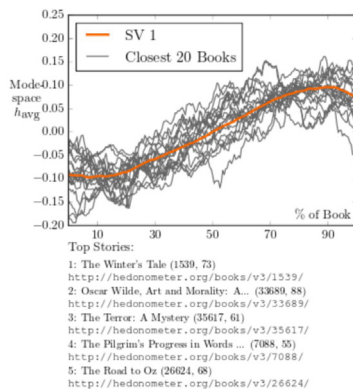
Do the emotional moments in a story fit together in any particular way, or are they scattered like clouds across the pages?

Does it matter if the protagonist feels dejected, angry, or apathetic after their flavored lip balms are stolen?



In the [Summer 2022 issue of Highlighter](#), we explored story structures that define stages in the plot. Referring to a narrative arc can help with planning and/or revising pacing and flow to create a smooth and impactful reading experience.

Fifty years ago, author Kurt Vonnegut taught that emotions in stories followed repeatable paths, too (watch him discuss story shapes here: <https://youtu.be/oP3c1h8v2ZQ>). Studies have now confirmed this using natural language processing and analytics on digital books to construct emotional arcs and predict reader engagement. Where narrative arcs chart what happens in a story, emotional arcs trace the sentiments the words evoke as people read.

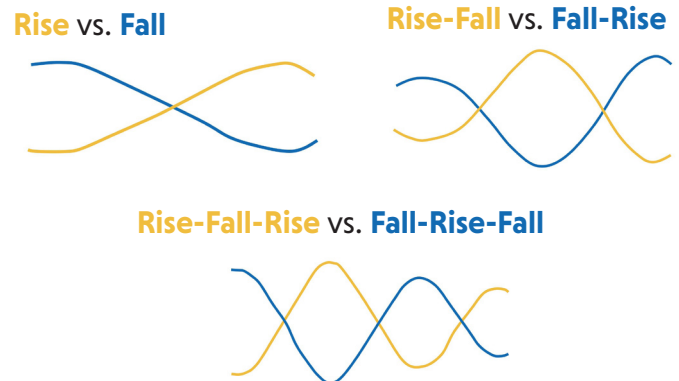
A study at the [University of Vermont in Burlington's Computational Story Lab](#) analyzed over 1,300 of the most downloaded English language fiction stories from Project Gutenberg's (<https://www.gutenberg.org/>) digital set. They applied "sentiment analysis" to capture the emotional content perceived in reading. The study charted the positive and negative emotional responses generated moment to moment through the book (see figure above).



The analysis revealed six core emotional arcs, or shapes:

1. **Rise:** Rags to riches (e.g., CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY by Roald Dahl) 
2. **Fall:** Riches to rags (tragedy) (e.g., THE METAMORPHOSIS by Franz Kafka) 
3. **Rise-fall:** Rise up, then fall (e.g., story of Icarus in Greek mythology) 
4. **Fall-rise:** Fall into a "hole," then climb out (e.g., JUMANJI by Chris Van Allsburg) 
5. **Rise-fall-rise:** Rise up, fall back, then reach goal (e.g., Cinderella folk tale) 
6. **Fall-rise-fall:** Fall, rise up, then suffer defeat (e.g., legend of Oedipus) 

The six emotional arcs are three pairs of inverses, or opposites:



We can use the arcs to understand emotion in our manuscripts and fine-tune what the reader will feel.

Emotional Story Building

(continued)

First, we can determine which emotional arc most closely aligns with our draft manuscript. If the story begins at a high point, does it steadily decline to a low ending or does it drop down then rise again? If the story begins at a low point, where does it go from there?

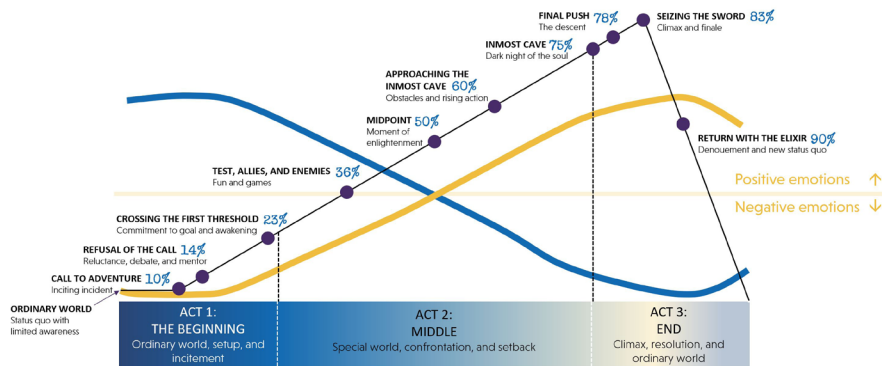
Having found the closest match, we can think through where the emotion in our manuscript may differ from the arc and if revising the emotions elicited in those areas could improve the story.

We can also overlay the emotional arc onto a narrative arc to see how they may complement and

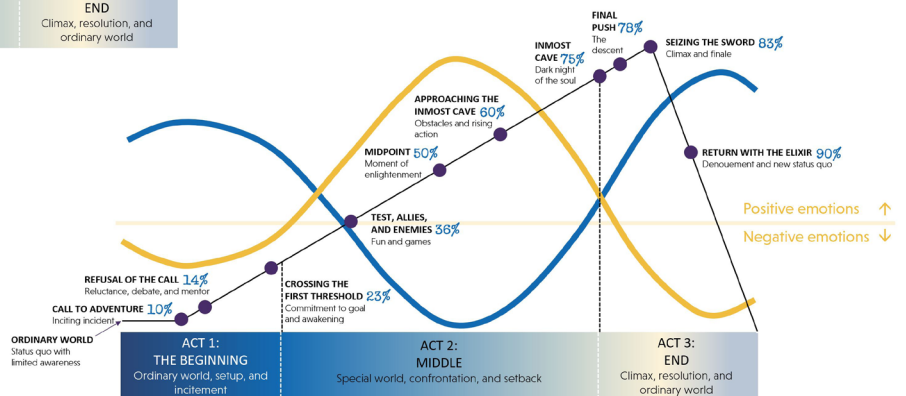
reinforce one another, as shown by the hero's journey figures below (for more info on this structure, see Ingrid Sundberg's article "[What is Arch Plot and Classic Design?](#)"). Note that the arcs trace the major emotional highs and lows at the level of the reading experience, not plot or subplots or emotions on a sentence or paragraph level.

(For a walk-through of the emotional arc study's key points, see Tibi Puiu's article "[These are the six emotional arcs of storytelling, big data study shows.](#)") Check out emotional dynamics graphs and ranking of words that cause "happiness shifts" in famous books at the site [Hedonometer](#).

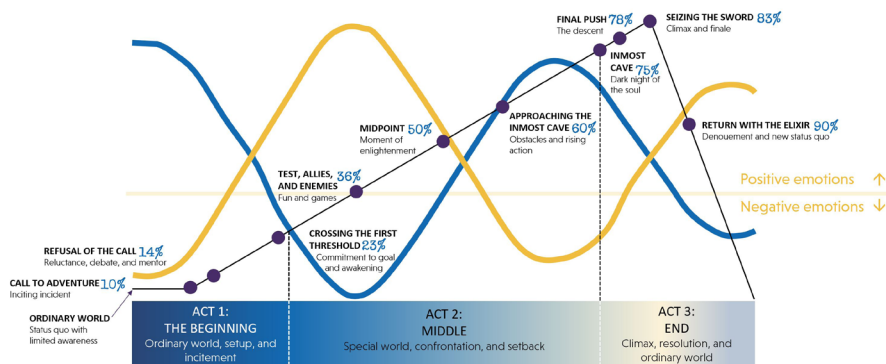
Rise vs. Fall



Rise-Fall vs. Fall-Rise



Rise-Fall-Rise vs. Fall-Rise-Fall

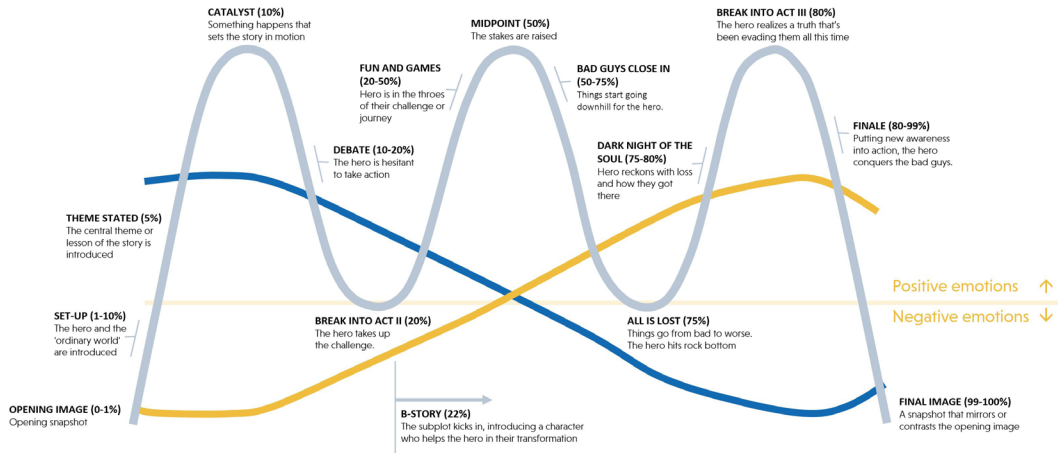


Emotional Story Building

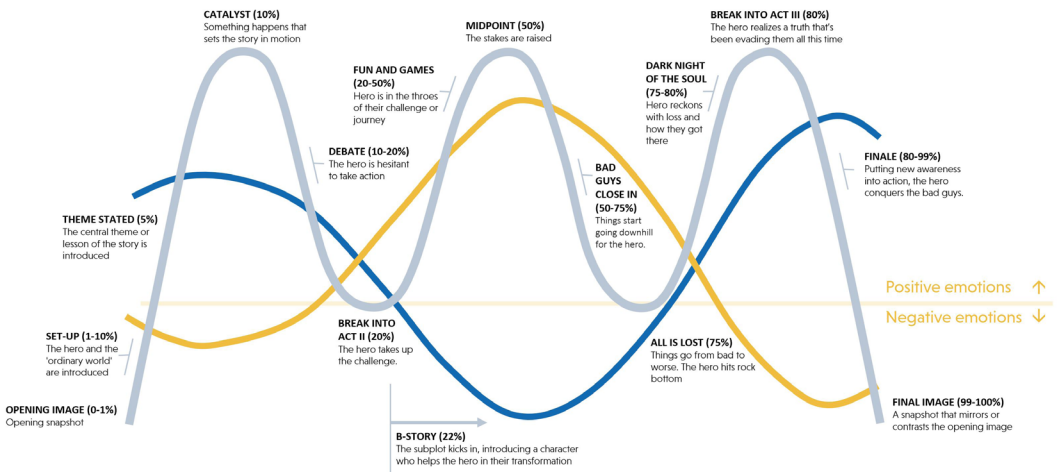
(continued)

As another example, the following figures overlay the emotional arcs onto the [Save the Cat story structure](#).

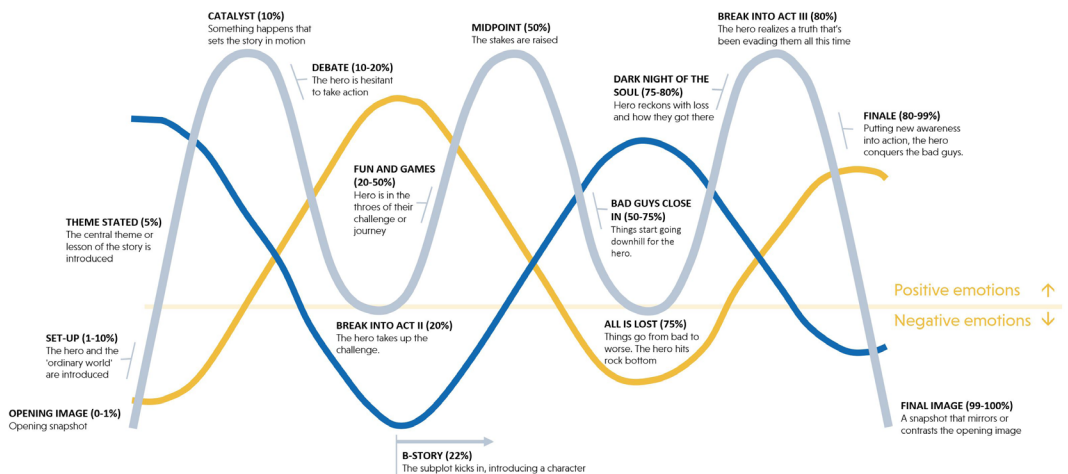
Rise vs. Fall



Rise-Fall vs. Fall-Rise



Rise-Fall-Rise vs. Fall-Rise-Fall



Emotional Story Building

(continued)

Reviewing the emotional and narrative arcs together may trigger plot ideas or help us spot key moments where we could more closely integrate characters' emotions, narrative word choices (like a "menacing" vs. "curious" look), and the actions in a scene.

The B-story or B-plot—a secondary plot that simplifies, exaggerates, inverts, or contrasts with the A-story—can help amplify emotion. An example given by September Fawkes in "[What is a B Story? 6 Key Qualities of B Stories](#)," is from HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN by J. K. Rowling: Harry needs to save Hagrid's pet Hippogriff, Buckbeak, who's wrongly accused of being dangerous and is sentenced to death (just like Sirius Black, who's thought to have betrayed Harry's parents in the A-story).

If we've mapped where narrative arc milestones (e.g., midpoint, inmost cave) fall in the manuscript, we can chart the chapter numbers on the emotional arc to see if that reveals any differences worth exploring. For example, if the chapter just before the bottom of the happiness curve is where a parent wins the lottery, we could lean into the negative emotions (e.g., teen children vying for money). If the winning is meant to uplift, shifting that plot development to an emotional upswing may make the story stronger.

Where we find we should heighten or adjust emotion, we'll need to visit our characters—the energy sources in our story—to change up how they're feeling.

Psychology describes emotion in relation to a person's ability to experience pleasure, and to the intensity of the emotion. At the "high" end of the scale is mania; at the opposite, or "low" end, is depression. Mania is characterized by high energy, risk-taking, and big moves. Depression is characterized by low energy, self-doubt, and loss of interest.

These opposites share attributes, too: A person in either state can be easily distracted and have dif-

ficulty concentrating, be irritable or illogical, have problems sleeping, and/or experience hallucinations.

At the center point between mania and depression is the "ideal" state, in which a person feels tranquil, in control, and safe (see below).



While our characters may insist that they "just want to be happy," if we writers allow them to remain centered, lounging in this tranquil state, they won't have compelling wants or needs to get them moving. Readers will get bored watching them. We need them to be off-center.

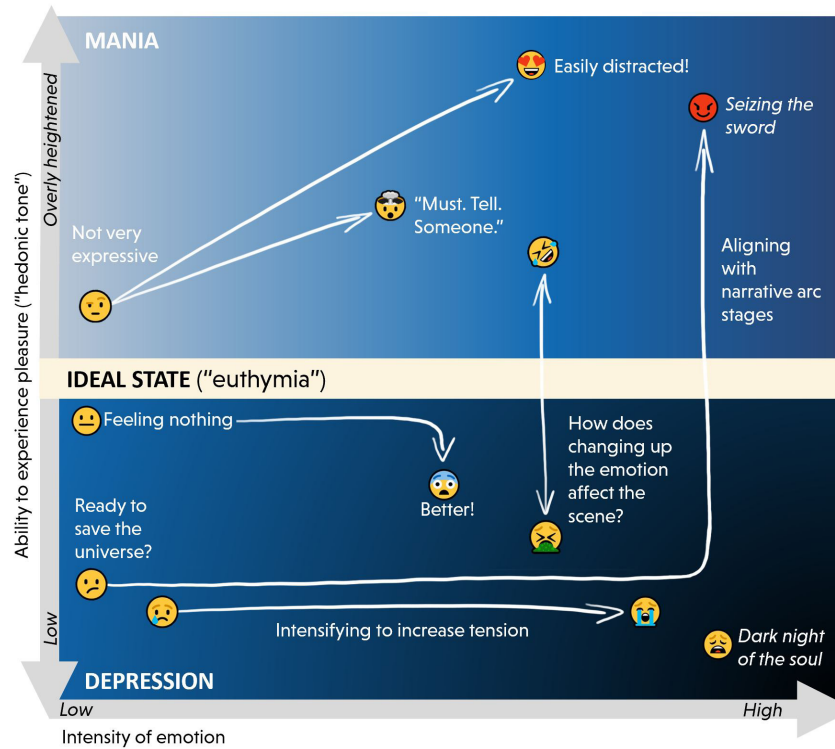
Sorry, characters.

Using the diagram, we can check if a character's emotional state fits with what we need them to do in a scene. For example, if we want the story's protagonist to plunge into the forest to search for their friend and we've made them feel depressed, they likely won't have the energy or confidence at that moment to do it. On the other hand, if we've filled our character with energy and made them feel unstoppable (i.e., edging toward mania), they may not be vulnerable or calm enough to reflect on why their teacher's comment that morning bothered them so much.

With this framing in mind, we can be deliberate in how we have characters respond emotionally to the

Emotional Story Building

(continued)



plot. The figure above shows examples of adjusting the dials of emotional tone and intensity.

We can also use behaviors driven by emotion to give readers hints on characters' states of mind. If we want to convey that a character is nearing a manic or depressive state, we could make them lash out at someone who bumps them, wander around sleeplessly at night, or reread the same paragraph over and over. A character obsessively writing their first name with their love interest's last name until they've filled a notebook is a sign of something inside (and things to come in the plot) that will make the reader feel something.

The following are additional tips for strengthening how emotion is used in the story:

- Assess if your **narrative point of view** is the best fit for the story, since whether it is being driven by a character (first person), the reader (second person), or a voice outside the story (third person omniscient or limited omniscient) will affect which emotions are conveyed, and how.
- Give characters **strong emotional motivations** for the plot so what happens is meaningful to them.

- Put characters' **emotional beginning and end states further apart** on the hedonic tone scale (mania- depression) to increase how high and low their emotions can go.
- If your story is too flat, push the high moments higher and low moments lower and **fluctuate in-between emotions more**.
- Place **contrasting scenes** next to each other (e.g., high emotional state next to low emotional state) to increase their effect.
- If there are flat emotional lines at the start or end of the story, **start the story later or end it earlier** to make it more engaging.

For more ideas, see Eva Deverall's post "[Character Arc Plot & Kurt Vonnegut's Story Shapes.](#)"

Whatever our writing style and stories, we can make design choices with emotions and dovetail them with the plot to influence the reading experience.

To our characters, we hope you enjoy the emotional ride. It will build character, as they say (perfect for you!). As for us, may we all have a superbly centered, ideal state sort of day ... or at least get a good story idea out of it. //H//

Emotion in Illustration

by Mimi Simon

When illustrating a story, one of your most important considerations should be capturing the emotions of the characters and situations. This can be achieved by carefully considering three very important elements of art: composition, shape design, and color.

Element 1: Composition

First, and perhaps most important, is composition. Think about the elements of composition in light of the emotion you want to portray. That emotion should dictate its shape. Avoid designing your composition first, then trying to shoehorn the emotion into it. That will inevitably result in a confused image.

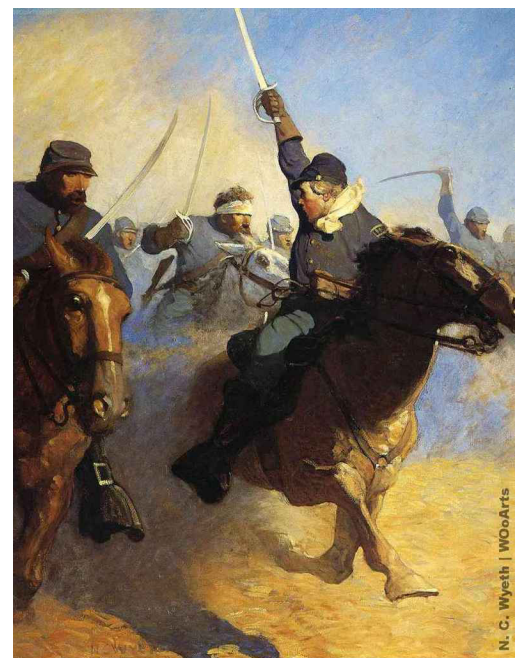
You may have heard a number of rules about composition that come from traditional Western art. These ideas—the rule of thirds, pyramid compositions, circular compositions, and avoidance of cropping—can be useful, but it's important to know that they were designed to create calm and harmonious compositions. See Raphael's "Madonna in the Meadow." It is a perfect example of a calm, harmonious scene that uses the rule of thirds and a pyramid composition.

However, these rules may not apply if you're trying to portray more intensity or drama in your scenes. In fact, they may need to be altered or thrown out all together. Rather than placing your character a third of the way across your composition, for example, you can add drama by adjusting the balance, placing him or her only a quarter of the way across.

Cropping can also lend intensity to your compositions. While it's important not to crop in really awkward places like joints, the neck, and the middle of a character's face, cropping in unusual places can have a dramatic or interesting effect. See how N.C. Wyeth's strange cropping of



"Madonna in the Meadow" by Raphael, 1605



"War" by N.C. Wyeth, 1914

Emotion in Illustration

(continued)



"Hills B" by Stevie Lewis from "Go! Go! Cory Carson" (Netflix, 2018)

horses and riders in "War" gives the composition a sense of speed and urgency.

Element 2: Shape Design

The next element to consider is shape design. The kinds of abstract shapes that the objects, characters, and values in your composition create will impact the overall emotion of your image. An illustration made up of shorter, rounder shapes like "Hills B" by Stevie Lewis (shown above) will appear softer and more playful, whereas an image made of narrower, more angular, or pointy shapes can appear more threatening or angry. This is also something to consider when designing your characters, and your composition as a whole.

Even after your characters are designed, there are further considerations when it comes to placing them in a particular image. Your characters need to

be posed in a way that clearly indicates their emotion to the viewer. Looking at references or posing yourself is very helpful, but it's also important to go beyond reference and exaggerate the pose, especially if your illustration is cartoony or humorous. Even if your illustration isn't humorous, exaggeration will make your image clearer and more compelling.

You can further clarify your pose by making sure the character is viewed at the perfect angle to best see and understand it. For example, if a character is bent in sorrow but turned away, it may be hard to understand the meaning of their posture. A profile view would help the viewer clearly see the sorrow on their face and in their body position.

Not only do the poses and expressions of your characters need to be clear and bold but they must

Emotion in Illustration

(continued)

also make sense for the character's identity. For example, an elderly person may not pose the same way as a young person even if they feel the same emotion. The same is true for an expressive character versus a reserved one, or a bold character versus a timid one. Sketching from life and reference, as well as studying other artists you admire, will help you get a feel for these differences.

It is also important to make sure that the way you draw your characters' poses and expressions fits with your overall style. If you're drawing in a volumetric style with a traditional linear perspective, the characters' expressions must wrap volumetrically around their faces, and their poses need to work within the perspective of the scene.

Conversely, if you're drawing in a flat style, the expressions must also be drawn flat, and the poses should avoid incorporating too much perspective or foreshortening. In this illustration by Aurelius Battaglia, each character is posed in such a way that their expressions and silhouettes are clear while remaining flat.

Element 3: Color

Last is color. While emotion can be achieved in an illustration by using just the first two elements, color can be extremely helpful if you want to heighten or deepen the sense of emotion. Some color schemes have natural emotional associations that you can tap into to set the mood of your image.

For example, warm color schemes (red/orange/yellow) tend to evoke a more energetic mood while cool color schemes (green/blue/purple) evoke less energy. Monotone and analogous color schemes



Aurelius Battaglia illustration from FIRESIDE BOOK OF FAVORITE AMERICAN SONGS (Simon & Schuster, 1952)

tend to feel calmer and more harmonious than color schemes with more contrast, such as complementary and triadic, which tend to be more dramatic.

However, none of these color schemes have hard and fast emotions attached to them. As you begin to change the contrast and saturation of your color scheme, you can change the mood it evokes as well. For example, increasing the contrast of your colors can make the color scheme more dramatic while condensing the values can make it calmer. You may start out with a seemingly calm color scheme like blue and green. But in a night scene, for instance, you might add dark shadows and stark

Emotion in Illustration

(continued)



"Ext. The Drowsy Gator Hotel" by Dan Krall from "Scooby Doo" (Warner Bros, 2009)

moonlight, suddenly making it much more intense and moody.

High-contrast warm-cool color schemes can benefit dramatic scenes because the viewer's eye will go straight to the warmest, brightest part, where the action would be happening. With reduced contrast and saturation a warm-versus-cool palette could work for a calm image as well.

While these basic color schemes work for most things most of the time, sometimes a story will call for you to get really weird or scary. Don't be afraid to try something unusual and experiment with different color combinations once in a while.

Look at the image above by Dan Krall. It's a warm-versus-cool color scheme, but the cool is actually pretty warm and the warm is pushed to neon in order to stay warmer. The result is both beautiful and rather unsettling.

The examples given here are all tools you can employ to increase the emotion in your images, but they are not rules. Since every artist works differently and has different sensibilities, some of these tools may work for you while others may not. Next time you begin drawing or painting, try playing with some of them, and you may find that you end up handling emotion in a whole new way. //H//

Hook readers with emotions

"How to Get Emotion Onto the Page" by Writing Coach with Writers Helping Writers

"From the very first sentence your story must incite that delicious sense of urgency that makes readers have to know what happens next. But what is it that actually hooks us? The answer is emotion. Every story, even the most rough and tumble, is emotion driven." <https://writershelpingwriters.net/2019/01/how-to-get-emotion-onto-the-page/>

Gain techniques for stirring readers' emotions

"Creating Emotion in the Reader" by fiction editor Beth Hill on The Editor's Blog

"I wrote an article on the importance of creating emotions in readers, but I've noticed that writers are looking for specifics on how to accomplish that. So, this article complements that first one, presents practical tips on how to stir the reader's emotions." <https://theeditorsblog.net/2011/01/30/creating-emotion-in-the-reader/>

Make your characters emotionally engaging

"Writing With Heart: Creating an Emotionally Engaging Character" by Ruth Ann Nordin on A Writer's Path

"Emotion-driven writing is delving deep within the character and being right there in the moment, going through everything your character is as the character is going through it. It's writing at a heart level. You don't have to tell the reader what the character is feeling or doing. You show it." <https://ryanlanz.com/2020/12/19/writing-with-heart-creating-an-emotionally-engaging-character/>

Convey emotion through characters

"How to Show Emotion on the Page: The Cheat Sheets" by Jessica A. Kelley's on Life Gone Write blog

"Characterization is heavily rooted in emotion. Physical traits and personal history can help mold a vivid depiction for a reader, but what really tells an audience about a story's protagonist and counterparts is how individuals react to situations. Those reactions are portrayed through emotion." <https://lifegonewrite.com/2016/11/15/how-to-show-emotion-on-the-page-the-cheat-sheets/>

Write emotion-filled scenes

"Make Your Readers Cry: Writing Emotional Scenes" by Allison Maruska on A Writer's Path

"I watched The Hunger Games last night. I read the book before the movie came out, and I've seen the movie a few times. So I obviously knew what would happen. Still, a certain scene got me ... I want to use this and other scenes from the movie to pick apart what makes an emotional scene work." <https://ryanlanz.com/2019/02/17/make-your-readers-cry-writing-emotional-scenes/>

Learn emotions' signs and behaviors, internal sensations, and mental responses

THE EMOTION THESAURUS: A WRITER'S GUIDE TO CHARACTER EXPRESSION by Becca Puglisi and Angela Ackerman (JADD Publishing, 2019)

"The bestselling Emotion Thesaurus, often hailed as 'the gold standard for writers' and credited with transforming how writers craft emotion, has now been expanded to include 55 new entries!" <https://writershelpingwriters.net/bookstore/>

Learn about emotional arcs in storytelling

"These Are the Six Emotional Arcs of Storytelling, Big Data Study Shows" by Tibi Puiu for ZME Science

"Researchers put 1,737 stories from Project Gutenberg's fiction collection under the 'big data' lens to spot subtle emotional plot patterns called arcs. Their analysis suggests there are six main emotional arcs that writers have used for the last 2,000 years." <https://www.zmescience.com/science/news-science/emotional-arc-stories/>

Use word sounds to create mood, effects, and emotion

"Mood, Effect, and Emotion: Sentence Transformation" by Renée LaTulippe on Today's Little Ditty blog

"In my last lyrical language post, 'Sound Bites: Making Writing Musical,' we looked at the properties of sounds in the English language and how we can use them to enhance our writing. In this post, we're going to put those ideas into practice with a little writing exercise." <https://michellehbarnes.blogspot.com/2014/11/renee-latulippe-mood-effect-and-emotion.html>

Learn how to fine-tune word choices

"Word Choices: Writing Picture Books that Soar" by Leslie Helakoski and Darcy Pattison

"Choosing words carefully can do more than define. Is your story lulling a child to sleep? Or helping them zoom and zip? ... Word choice—even the sound of the words—can make the difference between a picture book manuscript that soars and one that stays grounded." <https://www.highlightsfoundation.org/2017/04/03/word-choices-writing-picture-books-that-soar/>

Illustrate clear facial expressions for your characters

"Drawing Simple Clear Facial Expressions" by The Art of Aaron Blaise

"In my 21 years animating at Disney, I discovered early on that a simple approach to character expression was always the clearest and most emotional for the audience. Here's how I do it." <https://youtu.be/TYa-qmL6XUs>

Infuse your illustrated characters with more emotion and expression

"The Eyebrows are the Window to the Soul: Quick Tips for Giving Your Characters Emotion and Expression" by KidLitArtists

"I have warm fuzzy memories of when my babies first started looking into my eyes. We are hard-wired to connect to one another, to understand one another, by reading facial expressions. If we want children to connect to the illustrations in our stories, it's imperative that we create characters that clearly convey specific emotions. So here's a list of some tips to help give your characters that emotion and expression." <https://kidlitartists.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-eyebrows-are-window-to-soul-quick.html>

ONGOING

SCBWI regional events

Various dates (*virtual*)

Events with children's literature industry professionals from all around the world. <https://www.scbwi.org/regional-virtual-events/>

OCTOBER

SCBWI Artober 2023

October 1-31, 2023 (*free virtual event*)

Join the illustration prompts under the hashtag #scbwiArtober2023 to create and share illustrations in your chosen art medium. Post your work with the #scbwiArtober2023 hashtag on Instagram and Twitter and add your work to the SCBWI Illustrator Gallery using the tag "Artober" in the keyword field. www.scbwi.org/artober

Oregon Region Level Up! with Suzanne Bloom: Couples Therapy: Strengthening the Relationship Between Pictures and Words

October 18, 2023, 6-7:30 p.m. PT/9-10:30 p.m. ET (*paid virtual event, register in advance*)

Suzanne Bloom teaches about creating a closer connection between words and images in picture books. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/suzanne-bloom>

Eastern PA Webinar: Traditional Publishing Demystified—What Writers Need to Know

October 24, 2023, 3-4:15 p.m. (*paid virtual event, register in advance*)

Lynnette Novak, an agent at The Seymour Agency, will answer common questions agents receive and talk through the dos and don'ts for offers of representation and expectations for having an agent. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/webinar-traditional-publishing-demystified-what-writers-need-to-know>

Midsouth (KY/TN) Online Workshop With Erica Rodgers: Nano or No-no? Preparing to Pump Out Words on a Deadline!

October 26, 2023, 7-8:30 p.m. ET (*free virtual event for Premium Members and \$15 for Registered Users*)

Author Erica Rodgers leads a workshop on planning creative projects and setting deadlines. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/online-workshop-with-erica-rodgers-nano-or-no-no-preparing-to-pump-out-words-on-a-deadline>

Midsouth Critique-Palooza

October 28, 2023-January 20, 2024 (*paid virtual event, register in advance*). **Manuscript submissions are due by October 28, 2023**

Listen to a panel of editors, agents, and published authors as they discuss how to apply agent/editor feedback in the revision process, and submit a manuscript to be critiqued by an industry professional (optional). <https://www.scbwi.org/events/midsouth-critique-palooza>

**Have
an idea for
an article?**

Let us know!

Send an email to

MidAtlanticHighlighter@gmail.com

Eastern PA Portfolio Palooza: Virtual Illustrator Day 2023

October 28, 2023, 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. *(paid virtual event, register in advance)*

Join this region's annual rally-day event for illustrator members with a keynote speech by author and illustrator Greg Pizzoli. Other faculty: agent Sarah Dillard, Painted Words; editor Michele McAvoy, The Little Press; and art director Jim Hoover, Penguin/Random House. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/upcoming-events/register-info>

NOVEMBER

National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo)

November 1-30, 2023 *(free virtual event with optional in-person meetups)*

Write a novel in a month! Join NaNoWriMo to track your progress, set milestones, connect with other writers, and participate in local write-in events. <https://nanowrimo.org/>

Mid-Atlantic Fall Peer Critique Event

November 8, 2023, 6-9 p.m. *(free in-person and virtual event, register in advance)*. **Manuscripts are due by October 30, 2023**

Mid-Atlantic Event Critique Coordinator Terry Jennings, is hosting a hybrid in-person (Reston, VA location)/ virtual (Zoom) critique event. Members can receive feedback on their work in progress and connect with other writers. Manuscripts for exchange (first ten pages of a novel or a full picture book manuscript) are due on October 30. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/fall-critique-event>

Mid-Atlantic Write-In (Chesterfield County Public Library in Richmond, VA)

November 11, 1-4 p.m. *(free, in-person event, register in advance)*

Gather with other Mid-Atlantic members to work on your kidlit projects to gain support and motivation. The write-in will start with a 30-minute session for inspirational talk and goal-setting. Snacks will be provided. <https://www.scbwi.org/regions/midatlantic/beltways-and-bridges>

Oregon Level Up! "Information Storytelling: How to Bring the Tools of Fiction to Nonfiction Picture Books" with Laura Purdie Salas

November 13, 2023, 6-7:30 p.m. PT/9-10:30 p.m. ET *(paid virtual event, register in advance)*

Learn how to apply elements from fiction, like narrative voice, rising tension, humor, emotion, and setting, to strengthen nonfiction manuscripts. Author Laura Purdie Salas will share how she's used these elements in her writing and how to overcome challenges. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/laura-purdie-salas>

Mid-Atlantic Webinar: From Cookbooks to Children's Books: Writing What You Know

November 14, 7-8:15 p.m. *(paid virtual event, register in advance)*

Mid-Atlantic PAL member Patricia Tanumihardja will teach writing techniques she's developed from translating her experience as a freelance food journalist and cookbook author to writing for children. She will also share insights from other published authors who write what they know. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/from-cookbooks-to-children-s-books-writing-what-you-know/register-info>

Western Washington From Eyewitness to Heart-Witness: Crafting Nonfiction Point of View

November 14, 2023, 6:30-7:30 p.m./9:30-10:30 ET *(paid virtual event, register in advance)*

Author Beth Anderson will guide participants in exploring the power of point of view (POV) in nonfiction, from the basics to more complex ideas like psychic distance and interiority. She will provide examples of how POV affects characterization, voice, "show don't tell," the emotional arc, and the reader. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/from-eyewitness-to-heart-witness-crafting-nonfiction-point-of-view>

San Diego Illustrator Mentorship with Martha Rago, V.P. Executive Creative Director, Penguin Random House

November 25, 2023-April 25, 2024 *(paid series of virtual events, register in advance)* **Registration opens on November 2, 2023**

Register for an Illustrator Mentorship with Martha Rago, V.P. Executive Creative Director, Penguin Random House. The mentorship give 20 illustrators or author/illustrators interested in illustrating picture books, book covers, or art for chapter and middle-grade books the opportunity to create a children's book dummy and work directly with Martha Rago. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/illustrator-mentorship-with-martha-rago-from-random-house-publishing>

DECEMBER

Western PA Webinar—"How to Do an Interview!" with Elizabeth Pagel-Hogan

December 11, 2023, 7-8 p.m. *(paid virtual event, register in advance)*

Author Elizabeth Pagel-Hogan will share tips and techniques on how to request and conduct an interview. In this webinar, she'll teach how to connect with interview subjects, give tips and suggestions for preparing and conducting the interview, and answer questions on following up after the interview. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/scbwi-pa-west-presents-how-to-do-an-interview-a-webinar-with-elizabeth-pagel-hogan>

JANUARY

Eastern PA Webinar—The Next Big Step: Reaching Out to Agents

January 8, 2024, 7-8:15 p.m. *(paid virtual event, register in advance)*

Agent Mary Cummings will discuss how to know when you are ready to submit your work, where to find agents, how to communicate with agents, and dos and don'ts for how to present yourself and your work. The session will discuss actual queries to illustrate what's been successful. A limited number of critiques are available. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/webinar-the-next-big-step-reaching-out-to-agents>

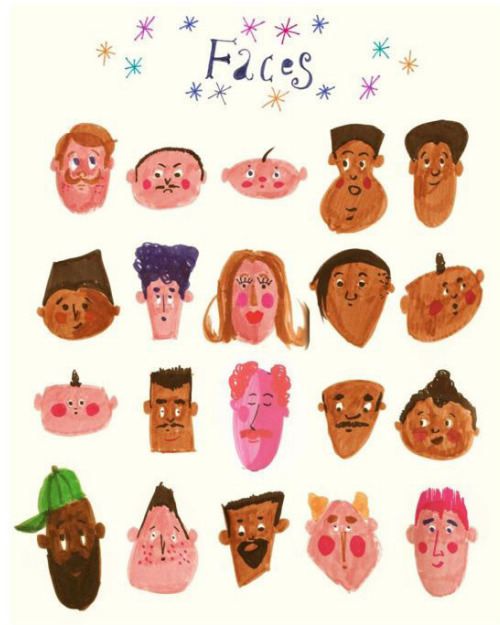
MOOD BOARD

I chew at my lips and smooth down
my hair,
look up at the lights and squint at their
glare.
Rubbing the sweat from my hands to
my thighs,
I take a deep breath...then close my
eyes.

- Excerpt from MY PIANO by Jen Fier Jasinski (Author), Gnome
Road Publishing (2023)



CARINA SANTILLAN



MARTIN SAAVEDRA

The train's whistle sounded
as they pulled into the
station, and she thought for
a moment of Katarina. The
special whistling sound they
used to call each other for
chores or fun seemed a
distant memory now.

- Excerpt from TO THE COPPER COUNTRY—
MIHAELA'S JOURNEY by Barbara Carney-Coston
(Author), Wayne State University Press (2017)