



# Windows into Illustration: Catherine Rayner

Article Author:

[Catherine Rayner](#) [1]

[243](#) [2]

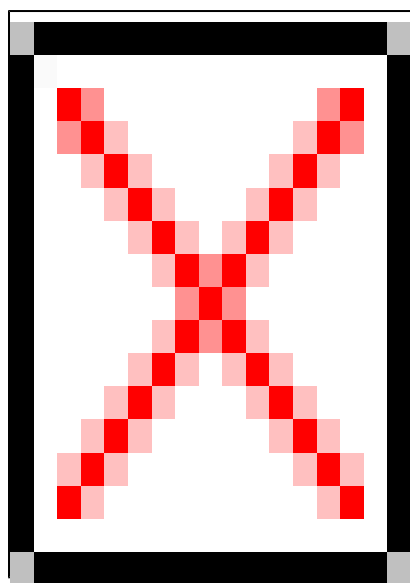
Article Category:

Windows into Illustration

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## Catherine Rayner on the making of Arlo

A childhood immersed in books and pictures and attentive observations of pets and wildlife led [Catherine Rayner](#) [3] to art schools in Leeds and then Edinburgh, where she specialised in printmaking and illustration. Since then she has become one of our most admired and successful illustrators with a string of favourite books and awards to her name, including the **Kate Greenaway Medal**. Here she describes how she created the sleep-deprived star of her new book, [Arlo](#) [4].

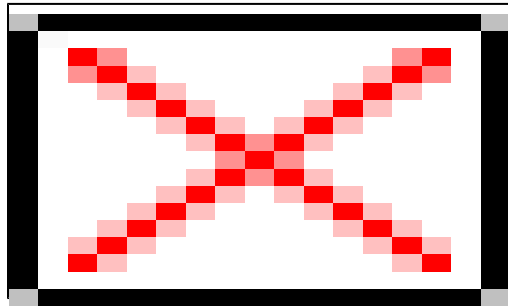


Arlo feels as though he's been in my head as a character for ever. It's a funny feeling when you start to draw a character you've known for a while - it's like an old friend coming to visit and makes you feel calm and happy. It certainly doesn't happen often so it's a really lovely treat when occasionally it does!

The idea for Arlo happened a little while before I realised exactly what his story would be. I always knew I wanted to make a book about sleep and mindfulness for children, and I wanted to be able to incorporate sleeping lions somehow, but I just hadn't figured out a way to make it work.

I have two children; both sometimes struggle to get to sleep and I make up little poems for them at bedtime to help them nod off and calm their minds after a busy day. When I was working on the book I started researching relaxation techniques, mindfulness and meditation for children. There was a lot of connection and I went about simplifying what I knew as a parent and had learned so I could draw on something that would hopefully become a helpful part of the bedtime ritual for parents and children alike. There is a rhyme in the story, which is memorable, and my boys now say it to themselves before lights off time (I also now often use it when I can't get to sleep). I very much hope other children will learn it and find it helpful too. I really wanted to make a book that is primarily an enjoyable read and a visual treat

but which also has gentle messages in the story that will be absorbed at a deep level.

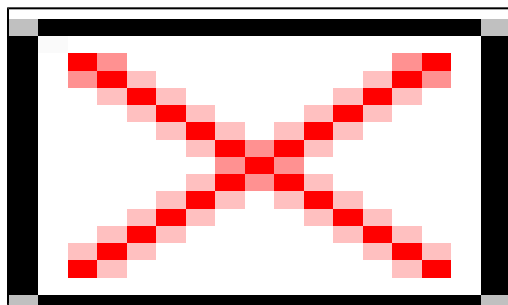


There are two key drawings in the book for me; the first being the page where we realise that Arlo REALLY needs to get some sleep. "Everybody knows that lions need a lot of sleep, and Arlo was EXHAUSTED." Drawing a dog tired makes you feel pretty weary yourself. When I'm working on a character who is showing a strong emotion, I always find that I start to feel the same! I know I have to in order to understand the body language I need to create on the page.

Even though Arlo is obviously a lion and I am a human; Arlo drops his shoulders and his head in a way that I would. His eyes look small and sunken and he has a very sad expression. Even the textures in his coat, made up of ink blobs, bubbles and scribbles are down.

A special thing about drawing animals is that you have other body parts to show emotions too. Tails are brilliant, for example and you'll notice Arlo's indicates his mood throughout the book. On this page it's hanging limply - even his tail is tired. Whiskers and ears are also excellent for helping to depict a mood.

I feel that the most wonderful thing about creatures in books, is that every child or adult in the world can relate to them on a level that is sometimes not possible with an illustration of a human. This is partly why I've always preferred to have lead animal characters exploring human emotions in my picture books (although I do draw people sometimes too). My artwork travels all over the world and an emotional connection with the characters is what brings them to life.



The second "key" drawing is simply a whole page of happy, sleeping and dreaming Arlo. With huge paws and an even bigger smile, the relief of sleep was even a dream to paint. You'll notice that his tail is loose and relaxed, and the mark-making in his body also reflects his mood. I always illustrate my books in the correct page order so I'm travelling at the right pace of the story with my character(s). By this point in creating the artwork, I too was desperate for Arlo to get some sleep! I think you can feel my relief for my poor tired lion on this page! At this point he is ready to help you fall asleep too?

[Arlo the Lion Who Couldn't Sleep](#) [4] by Catherine Rayner is published by Macmillan Children's Books on 20th August 2020 in hardback, £12.99

Page Number:

6

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[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/243>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/194/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-194-catherine-rayner>

[4] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/243/childrens-books/reviews/arlo-the-lion-who-couldnt-sleep>