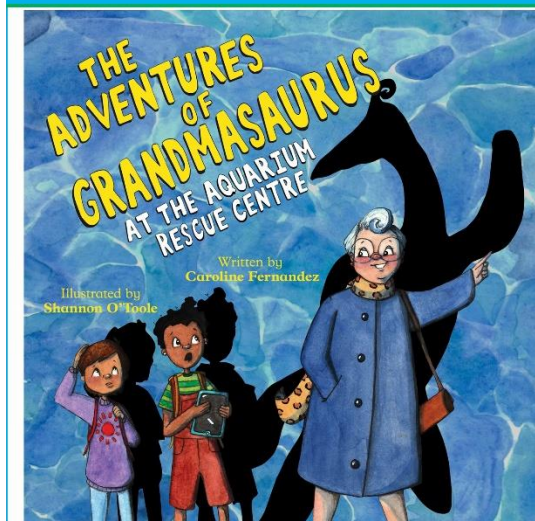




Illustrator Spotlight — Shannon O’Toole



Illustrator: Shannon O’Toole

Can you tell us a little bit about how you came to illustrate these stories and what you thought about the stories when you first read them?

Thanks so much! Caroline and I had previously worked together on *Stop Reading This Book!* Published by Common Deer Press, so when I was asked to collaborate again on *The Adventures of Grandmasaurus*, and the sequel *The Adventures of Grandmasaurus: At the Aquarium Rescue Centre*, I was elated! When I first read the manuscript, I thought it was such a fun and creative storyline and thought there were so many opportunities for some unique illustrations.

How did you feel when you were illustrating the stories?

When I am illustrating books, I feel playful. If something makes me smile while I am drawing it, then I feel that it might make someone else smile when they’re reading the book. I often like my work to feel light-hearted because I feel light-hearted when I illustrate!

What media did you use in creating the illustrations?

I used watercolour and pencil to create these illustrations, on Fluid Hot Press watercolour paper. It has a lovely smooth texture and makes it easy to scan and digitize.

Did you find any part of the aquarium story difficult to illustrate?

One challenge in all the Grandmasaurus books would be researching to make sure my depiction of that dinosaur or reptile is accurate, while still making it my own. Also, the sheer size of the creatures in the story can sometimes make it challenging to create a setting where it can fit, without losing any details such as expressions on the character's faces.

What part did you enjoy illustrating the most?

For this Grandmasaurus book, as well as the first one, I really enjoyed illustrating the sneeze image of grandma. I enjoy looking in the mirror and imitating a sneeze face and try to recreate it in my painting. It's not a facial expression I get to draw very often, and it makes me smile.

Do you have a favourite illustration?

I have many favourites! I would have to say I really enjoyed the "chase" spread in the middle of the book, where the two children weave between aquarium tanks observing grandma's latest transformations. It was a great challenge and I loved painting the children on the other side of the tank.

I also really enjoyed the last spread when grandma and Ms. Priya (the teacher) are walking out of the aquarium and grandma leaves behind wet foot prints. I thought it was a fun wink to the reader.

How would you like teachers to discuss your illustrations with children?

I would like for teachers to utilize the illustration clues to make predictions about what might occur next in the story, as I think students could really have fun guessing where or what Grandmasaurus will be next.

Do you have any advice for children when creating artworks?

Draw what you love and keep doing it! Art is a beautiful thing and should be something you're enjoying. Make artwork that you love, and others will love it too.

When did you know you wanted to be an illustrator?

When I was a toddler, I would draw on walls, in the cracks of doors and under tables. It was clear I was a creative person. When I was about 6 years old, I entered a colouring contest, and won a free cake. It was such a simple, little thing, but it was a huge moment for me as a child. From that point onwards, I was confident I wanted to be an artist! I studied painting in university, and painted portraits, and was focusing more on producing gallery work. Then one day, I had the opportunity to illustrate a book for a friend. I found the process of illustrating to be so wonderful, and I knew that from that point onwards, this was what I wanted to do.

What people or events influenced your decision to take this journey as an illustrator?

I've always admired the illustrations in books as a child. I used to closely observe the lines and colours used in illustrations by Michael Martchenko, among others. I dreamt of seeing my name on the cover of a book as an illustrator and was always encouraged by my parents that it would happen one day. Having the opportunity to illustrate a friend's book gave me the confidence to pursue illustrating. I began to focus my artistic efforts towards this goal, worked on my portfolio and joined some professional development conferences. I am still on my journey as an illustrator, but I'm so grateful for all the opportunities I have had thus far.