



Windows into Illustration: Jon Agee

Article Author:

[Jon Agee](#) [1]

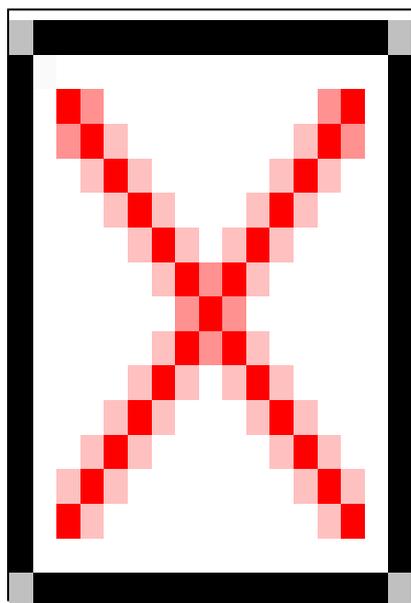
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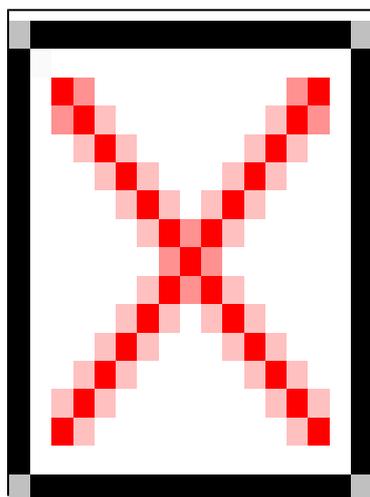
Windows into Illustration

Byline:

Jon Agee describes putting a wall in the middle of a book



Jon Agee is the author/illustrator of many books for children and is hugely well-known in America where he has won numerous awards: **Terrific** and **Milo's Hat Trick** between them have been named *New York Times Ten Best Illustrated Books*, *ALA Notable Book*, *Horn Book Fanfare*, *PW Best Books of the Year*, *Book Sense Top Ten Pick* and *LA Times Best Children's Picture Books*. New publisher Scallywag Press are now bringing his books to the UK, including **The Wall in the Middle of the Book**, topical, witty and full of deadpan humour. Jon describes how he created the book.

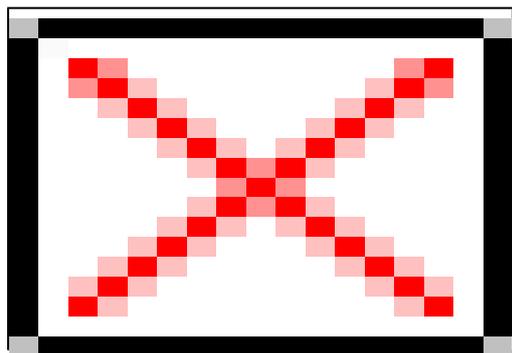


The compositions for **The Wall in the Middle of the Book** were sketched out in pencil. The individual elements ? ogre, knight, tiger, rhino, gorilla, fish, water, etc. ? were hand-painted on various textured papers, using watercolour, gouache

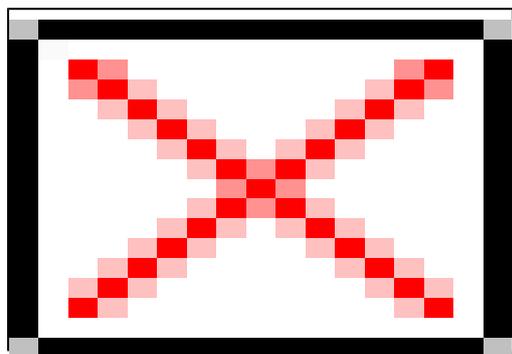
and crayon. There was another layer of simple digital effects: shading, trimming, highlights, etc. Like going to the beauty salon.

The most important effect was repeating the image of a wall ? the same, exact wall ? in the middle of every spread. This was purely conceptual ? treating the books gutter as if it was a barrier ? but it also created a two-dimensional, 'ant-farm' perspective, where all the action moved to the front of the stage (or page), which explains why the imagery is large and bold.

Because each composition uses up a double-page spread, and a lot is happening, an earlier version of the book was over 60 pages long. My editor saw that shortening the book ? to 48 pages ? would be an improvement, by condensing the tension/action. For example, in the earlier version, the rhino, tiger and gorilla, one by one, climb on top of each other (in an attempt to get over the wall) before a mouse enters and scares them off. In the published book, the mouse enters as the unsuspecting animals are in the process of climbing. The overlapping action makes the scene more dynamic.



There are a lot of moving parts in the book. Things are moving in different spaces ? water, land, air ? and at different paces. When the ogre wanders in, his first movements are slow, subtle, aloof. When the alligator appears, it pauses before suddenly swooping to the surface in an attempt to devour a duck. Meanwhile, the water flows in discreetly, before rising smoothly and quickly. All of these elements were designed ? or choreographed ? to enhance the drama of the story, move the narrative forward, and to make a book that is visually compelling.



My influences are many (1960 Eastern European posters, Saul Steinberg, Art Deco, Jan Lenica, Milton Glaser, John Burningham), but Leo Lionni comes to mind first, for his use of bold, cut-out paper shapes against the white page.

[The Wall in the Middle of the Book](#) [3] by Jon Agee is published by [Scallywag Press](#) [4], 978-1912650057, £7.99 pbk.

John Agee visited the UK with the [Children's Book Show](#) [5]. [Find out more](#) [6] about the **Children's Book Show** from director Sian Williams.

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