

## Brenda Roberts

On the positive side, there is more acceptance of digitally created artwork. There is also more mainstream acceptance and enthusiasm for comics in children's publishing and educational content. On the downside, there has been an erosion in rates of pay for illustration. Copyright law that gives financial allowances for the educational sector has actually harmed Canadian creators and will ultimately erode Canadian content available in books for Canadian students. Canadian creators, authors and illustrators, receive payment accrued from photocopying licences to copy pages from their books. Illustration is sold on a per use basis, so photocopying for free reduces the creator's source of income. When creators are paid less, it devalues their work, and undermines content development within Canada. Access Copyright has written extensively on this issue.

### Where do you find your inspiration?

I am often motivated by other artwork including children's book illustration. Inspiration often comes from experiencing independent comics, indie film/video/animation, fringe theatre, and activist art.

### Which project has been your favourite so far?

The *Jobs* book series for Annick.

### If you hadn't pursued a creative career merging the arts with teaching, what else interested you?

After high school I was set to choose between art school or taking sciences at university. I chose the arts so I could make things. Ironically sciences could have led to that too but I guess I didn't know that at the time. (Probably the result of a lack of real world examples of science careers provided for girls.) But actually, I think instinctively, I knew that the arts was the place for a creative open-ended kind of making. I think being a musician would be my alternate choice now, because it's artful and collaborative. I know this because in the last few years I've been playing in a humble little ukulele band.

### You now teach, as a professor at Seneca College. Please describe your program and explain what about this position appeals to you?

I teach visual storytelling in courses on comics and children's book illustration and a course in creativity. I like the content, the challenges, and working with young people. I'm always challenged to understand what the images are saying and

how to work with students to get them to develop their work while leaving it open-ended enough for them to solve the visual problems. I enjoy seeing how the students finish their artwork as their abilities grow into their own unique styles and approaches.

### What advice would you give to teacher-librarians to help them evaluate the illustrations in the material they are selecting?

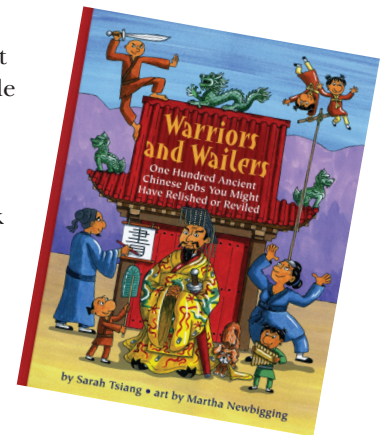
Consider the capacity of the picture for storytelling, diversity of representation (need to see more people of colour and non-heteronormative gender representations), and Canadian content.

### The importance of visual thinking is quite prominent right now with emphasis on concepts such as the view that "math is visual" and on techniques like visual note-taking. Has this had any impact in the world of visual arts and children's book illustration?

I think those working in the visual arts are familiar with visual thinking from direct experience. I sometimes feel impatient with the arts, and arts education, needing to be justified by how it serves other school subjects. This has been referred to as the "rhetoric of effects" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). The arts—cultural production and exchange—is what people are all about. Because cultural expression is at the heart of human interactions, the arts should have a central place in education (not just because they may serve some other educational goals).

### Tom Wujec pushes us to explore the qualities of animation, graphics and illustrations that create meaning. Do you view your role as "a creator of meaning"?

Of course. Everything we make has meaning, so certainly a drawing of a character with a speech bubble has meaning. Artists, illustrators, dancers, musicians, are all authors as much as people who create with words. In our culture words get priority and consequently those who create with words



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