

How to Find an Illustrator for a Children's Book

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/how-to-find-an-illustrator/>

This entry is part 3 of 4 in the series [Artist for Stories](#)

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If you've decided to self publish, you need to know the ins-and-outs of finding, collaborating with and then compensating an artist. Should you hire one if you want to traditionally publish? Maybe. Keep reading.

There are plenty of ways collaborating with an artist on your storybook can go south.

Here's what you need to know about artists in general so that you can pick the right one for your project.

One of the most commonly asked questions I get asked in a writing class is, "How much should I pay an artist to illustrate my storybook?" Then comes, "How do I find an illustrator?" The question of money always comes first.

What's the *typical* pay?

by Lita Judge

A first-time storybook illustrator will generally get \$1500 or more for a [typical 32-page](#) full-color book. This is the standard professional payment for a *first-time* book deal. If the project goes smoothly (meaning the artist produces clean, usable work on schedule), then the next project will be for more

money.

Some traditional publishers will pay less, some more. The reason the payment is so low for a first-time book project is because so many artists are unreliable. So if an artist hasn't yet completed a book project, they'll essentially need to prove that before earning a more substantial pay.

How much an illustrator gets paid per project depends also on their sales success. If the artist not only proves to be reliable, but attractive to buyers - their payscale goes up considerably.

The Maximum Pay

Christmas in New York by Roxie Munro

I was recently asked: "What is the highest payment an artist can earn [from an illustrated book]?" **The highest payment I know of for illustrating a storybook is \$17,000** - but that *excludes* the type of hard-hitting, 6-figure deal that some agents are able to bring for those they represent.

Think of artists like [Lita Judge](#) and [Roxie Munro](#). These gals are *incredibly talented* and have proven themselves many times over. (Lita has over 20 illustrated books on the market, Roxie has over 40 books.) I've no doubt they earn at least 5-digits for each book they bring to the market.

The Minimum Pay

I've also often been asked: *is there a minimum amount of money a writer can expect to pay for an artist?* No. If you're savvy and lucky, you can find a passionate artist willing to work within your budget.

If you are new to the publishing scene, it makes sense for you to seek an artist who is also new to all this. **That way, you can build your careers together.**

If nothing else, you can pay royalties to the artist - sans an advance. If you as the writer take that route, be prepared for a much longer timeline. Understand that the artist might have other, higher-paying gigs that take priority over yours.

It (*honestly*) isn't about the money. Not really. (But it helps!)

If you can't afford \$1500 or even half that amount, you can still arrange a payment plan for the artist. Many novice artists will be willing to work for royalties. Be honest with the artist about it and decide what it is you are able to do.

Don't stop before you've even begun just because you're broke. If every writer did that, there would be nothing at all to read. We all write on speculation, and if you're self publishing, that's a real risk that has to be a work of love first.

The important thing is finding an artist you genuinely like and trust - and who you feel you can count on

to follow-through with the project. It's no accident that "creative types" (like myself) have a reputation for being unreliable. That stereotype exists because it's all too often true. As a writer (or writer-artist), you know that well.

How to Choose an Artist

My best advice is to first look at an artist's habits – not really their abilities, but **what they habitually like to slug out**. Do they create the types of images that you want to see in your book?

I don't mean to suggest you have an artist copy their work for your book; but, if an artist clearly loves drawing sassy little girls in dirty play-clothes doing heroic things, then that is perhaps not the person you want to illustrate your book about a trip to the zoo. **If the artist is never *inspired* to doodle a polar bear, a zoo book is probably not their bag.**

Again, this really isn't about capability. It's about love. My next door neighbor is capable of drawing anything. That doesn't necessarily mean she's the right person to illustrate one of my stories. Finding the right artist to partner with isn't a small decision. There are so many reasons it can go south.

Work vs. Play

The best way to be - *more confident* - that the project won't go **thump** and leave you needing to find someone else to do the work is to find an artist who loves your story as much as you do. You've got to find an artist who is so thrilled about creating the artwork for your story that the whole thing just feels like playtime - for both of you.

When a creative project starts to feel like work, it will be back-burnered in favor of something else. You don't want that to happen with your story.

This can sometimes be a hard call that you have to make (saying no to an artist), especially if you genuinely love the artist's work. If their work just isn't a good match for your *current* project, don't hire them to do it. Remember that this artist might well be perfect for another book or book series down the road.

You *know* you have more than one book in you! Same goes for the artist.

From "Girl in a Nutshell" -sample artwork from Jillian van Piggelen.

How do you know what an artist doodles?

This is where the Internet is the artist's best friend. When an artist has a [Facebook page](#) and uploads their doodles as well as their finished projects, then that provides a way for any interested person to see what it is they love to do.

Scouring the Internet for talented artists who clearly love creating is something I just do whenever I can. I am always on the lookout for creative people I might want to work with some day.

If the artist doesn't generally choose to draw the subject matter you need in your book, then look for another artist who does.

It isn't enough that the artist is talented, it doesn't even matter how professional they are or how much experience they have. If they don't love the subject matter, they will not love creating the images for it. That lack of passion or compassion for the story will shine through in every picture.

It won't matter how much money you pay them to do it [because money isn't enough](#).

Who I Recommend

From "Twas the Night Before Understanding" -sample from Faridh Nasib.

Even though I do enjoy painting and have been working on illustrations for **The Bottlecap Tree** (and other manuscripts - all in various states of completion), I'm also collaborating with different artists for certain books. [Faridh Nasib](#) (a Christmas storybook), [Jillian Van Piggelen](#) (a dramatic fairytale) have proven to be both talented and reliable - so I highly recommend them!

These gals are capable of creating images that are *quite different* from what I myself would really be able to do. That appeals to me!

When to Hire

There are just two reasons a writer might want to collaborate with an artist.

1. If you want to present your manuscript in person to an agent or editor, you'll do well if you can show a [professional mock-up of the storybook](#). You just need to be clear that you personally hired the artist to create the mock-up for you (and not that the contract must be made with you both.) Usually, publishers prefer to choose their illustrator because they've worked hard to create a brand.
2. **[If you plan to self publish](#)**, I highly recommend hiring an artist unless you yourself are talented with a brush. We eat with our eyes (if it doesn't *look* like it would taste good, we don't want to eat it) and we also decide which books to purchase based on how attractive we find them.

When NOT to Hire

There are really just two situations where you should not hire an artist.

1. Do not hire an artist to create and design a book you want traditionally published. (This is NOT the same as [creating a mock-up](#)!) This is very expensive and more likely than not, no publisher will accept it.
2. If you are a talented artist, your chances of gaining an agent are *much higher* than if you are just a writer. Many [literary agents](#) are looking for author-illustrators, so [if you can show you're able to illustrate a book, do it!](#)

What About You?

Are you working on a storybook and need an artist? I can help you with that. Have you worked with an artist already? What was that like - did it go well? Write below, let me know - or just send me an email if you want to keep it private.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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Be sure to check out the other posts:

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