



A Club for Kids Who Love Books

CHASING VERMEER

Q&A with Brett Helquist

The illustrator talks about how he prepared for *Chasing Vermeer* and what advice he has for young artists.

What was the most challenging part of creating art for *Chasing Vermeer*?

The hardest part was finding a way to hide the pentomino code in the pictures. I didn't want to make the code too difficult or too easy to figure out.

What kind of research did you do for the project?

I spent a few days in Chicago with Blue Balliett exploring the neighborhood described in the book. The architecture is very important to the story, so I thought it was necessary to see it for myself. I also looked at some books about Vermeer, and just for fun I played with some pentominoes.

Who's your favorite painter? Why?

My favorite painter is N.C. Wyeth. His pictures are full of pirates, cowboys, and knights, all the things I love. His paintings tell great stories, they are full of adventure.



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You read a lot of comic books as a kid. Do you still?

I read them sometimes. I like *Hellboy* and *Bone*.

Any advice for aspiring young artists?

Learn how to draw very well. I know this sounds obvious but it really is the most important thing. Drawing is a skill that should be studied and practiced just like learning to play a musical instrument. I keep a sketchbook and try to draw every day. I also recommend reading and learning how to tell stories. Illustration, after all, is just telling stories with pictures.

This bonus feature about *Chasing Vermeer* was adapted from the *After Words* edition of the book. Find more interviews, information, and interactive features for *Chasing Vermeer* and other favorite titles at the *After Words* site (www.scholastic.com/afterwords).