



Eric Carle Author Study

Eric Carle is one of our favorite authors. His books and illustrations are simply delightful. We have found Eric Carle's stories tie in beautifully with a variety of different themes throughout the school year and children never tire of them. In this author study, you'll find biographical information about Eric Carle; an annotated list of his most popular books; stand-alone activities that highlight the beauty of Carle's works; as well as activities that can be integrated into your other teaching themes.

An Interview with Eric Carle

(This biography originally appeared in Scholastic Network's Author Library.)

Out of all the questions kids ask Eric Carle, "Where do ideas come from?" is the one he hears most often. Although Eric thinks it would take hours to fully respond, he offers this answer: "Of course, the question of where ideas come from is the most difficult of all. Some people like to say they get ideas when they're in the shower. That's always a very entertaining answer, but I think it's much deeper than that. It goes back to your upbringing, your education, and so forth." To Eric, ideas don't come from one place. They come from all the experiences in his life, all the thoughts in his mind, and all the feelings in his heart.

A Bridge to America

Eric Carle was born in Syracuse, New York, to German immigrants. When Eric was six, he and his parents moved back to Germany. Eric hated the strict discipline of his new German school. Sad and confused, Eric longed to return to America. "When it became apparent that we would not return, I decided that I would become a bridge builder. I would build a bridge from Germany to America and take my beloved German grandmother by the hand across the wide ocean."

It would be seventeen years before Eric returned. In a sense, this difficult period was a great source of inspiration for Eric's later books. As an artist, Eric strives to help children enjoy school more than he did. He says, "I am fascinated by the period in a child's life when he or she, for the first time, leaves home to go to school. I should like my books to bridge that great divide."

Learning to Love Nature

Growing up, Eric loved to walk through the woods with his father. He fondly recalls, "He'd turn over a rock and show me the little creatures that scurried and slithered about." On these walks, filled with stories and discovery, Eric learned to love nature. Giving us another clue to where he finds his ideas, Eric says, "I try to recall that feeling when I write my books."

Sometimes ideas for Eric's books came from just fooling around. At least that's how he describes the inception of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. "I playfully punched a hole into a stack of papers. I thought, a bookworm at work! Not enough for a book, but, nevertheless, a beginning."

Eventually, Eric submitted his story about the bookworm, who had been changed to a green worm named Willy. His editor liked the idea — almost. She asked, "How about a caterpillar?" And so Eric Carle's most famous book was born.

A Famous "Mistake"

By the way, Eric already knows that a caterpillar emerges from a chrysalis, not a cocoon! So don't bother writing to tell him. Eric explains how the famous "mistake" crept into the book:

"My editor contacted a scientist, who said that it was permissible to use the word cocoon. Poetry over science. It simply would not have worked to say, 'Come out of your chrysalis!' If we can accept giants tied down by dwarfs, genies in bottles, and knights who attack windmills, why can't a caterpillar come out of a cocoon?"

The most important part of developing a book, Eric believes, is working with editors to revise it. He says, "You have doubts. You hate it. You love it. You discuss it with your editors. You change it. Finally, at one point you just know it's right. After that it goes very quickly. The art for *The Tiny Seed* took only two weeks!"

Winding up the Thinking Machine

And so, where do ideas come from? Eric likes the answer that his Uncle August used to give. "I'd say, 'Uncle August, tell me a story.' Peering over his glasses he'd say, 'First you have to wind up my thinking machine.' And, as I had done many times before, I began to wind an imaginary lever near his temple. After a little while, all along he had made whirring noises, he shouted, 'Halt! I have a story for you!'" Eric says, "I like my Uncle August's answer to where stories come from. They come from your thinking machine. All you have to do is wind it up."

Eric Carle Bibliography

The following books are written and/or illustrated by Eric Carle.

- *Animals, Animals* (Scholastic, 1989). Eric Carle has beautifully illustrated a variety of poems about both real and make-believe animals.
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Bill Martin, Jr., illustrated by Eric Carle. (Henry Holt, 1992). This is a delightful repetitive story that focuses on what the animals see. A classic beginning-to-read selection.
- *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971). This is a practically wordless book that teachers can use for children who are at the pre-reading stage. This story shows a mouse looking for a friend.
- *Draw Me A Star* (Scholastic, 1992). *Draw Me A Star* is a beautiful story about the life of an artist and what happened when he drew a star.
- *Eric Carle's Dragons & Other Creatures That Never Were* Compiled by Laura Whipple (Philomel, 1991). Older children will enjoy reading these fantastic stories about dragons and creatures of the unknown.
- *Eric Carle's Treasury of Classic Stories for Children* (1988). Another beautifully compiled anthology.
- *The Foolish Tortoise*, written by Richard Buckley, illustrated by Eric Carle (Scholastic, 1985). In this story a tortoise decides that his shell is too heavy and difficult to move around. In his journeys that day he discovers how important his shell really is.
- *The Grouchy Ladybug* (Scholastic, 1977). In this story a ladybug learns the importance of using manners. This story sequences the events of the ladybug throughout the day using references to time.
- *Have You Seen My Cat?* (Scholastic, 1987). A young child encounters a variety of different felines from all over the world in his search for his own cat.
- *The Hole In The Dike* retold by Norma Green, illustrated by Eric Carle. (Scholastic, 1974). A young boy discovers a hole in a dike. He stays there until someone passes by and is able to get help from the city to mend it.
- *A House for Hermit Crab* (Picture Book Studio, 1987). Changes, changes...the perfect story to read as children prepare to move up to the next grade, or as a classmate moves away. The importance of finding new experiences and making new friends, but not forsaking the old ones, is stressed.

- *The Honeybee and the Robber* (Scholastic, 1981). In this book there are many moving parts and one pop-up. Children will learn important facts about honeybees in a fantastic story.
- *The Mixed-Up Chameleon* (Scholastic, 1989). In this story Carle incorporates rhyming with humor. The chameleon visits the zoo and finds desirable traits in all the animals he sees.
- *1, 2, 3 to the Zoo* (The Trumpet Club, 1991). *1,2,3 to the Zoo* is a wordless story that shows animals loaded in train cars going to the zoo. There are many different opportunities for children to count in this story.
- *Pancakes, Pancakes* (Scholastic, 1990). In this story children get a sense of how long it would take to make pancakes if you needed to gather all the ingredients, from scratch, from a farm.
- *Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me* (Picture Book Studio, 1986). Clever paper engineering complements the beautiful night sky illustrations portraying a father's attempt to satisfy his daughter's wish.
- *Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?* (Scholastic, Inc., 1991). This delightful sequel to *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* is once again a repetitive story that allows children to participate in the reading.
- *Rooster's Off to See the World* (Scholastic, Inc., 1972). Rooster sets off to see the world and invites different animals along the way to join him. He does not plan very carefully, forgets the necessities – and everyone wants to go back home!
- *The Secret Birthday Message* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972). This is a fun story that leads children on a secret journey to find the birthday gift.
- *The Tiny Seed* (Scholastic, 1987). Children can learn how seeds travel, germinate and grow to produce new seeds. Could a flower really grow THAT big???
- *Today is Monday* (Philomel, 1993). *Today is Monday* is a wonderful story based on the classic song. The story is a clever way to teach children the days of the week.
- *The Very Busy Spider* (1984); *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Scholastic, 1987); *The Very Quiet Cricket* (Scholastic, 1990). A favorite trilogy for insect themes and units in primary grades.
- *What's For Lunch?* (Philomel, 1982). This is a simple counting story that features a monkey and the foods he does not want for lunch.

Art Connections

(Adapted from *Draw Me A Star*)

Eric Carle prepares his own colored tissue papers to use for his illustrations. He is able to produce different textures by using various brushes to splash, spatter and fingerpaint acrylic paints onto thin tissue papers. These colored tissue papers are then used to produce the lively colorful illustrations seen in his books. Eric Carle cuts or tears the colored tissue paper into shapes as needed and they are glued onto white illustration board. Some areas of his designs, however, are painted directly on the board before the bits of tissue paper are applied to make the collage illustrations. The art is then scanned by laser and separated into four colors for reproduction on sheet-fed offset printing presses. Using similar techniques, you can have your students make their own colored tissue paper to use later to illustrate stories they have written, just like Eric Carle.

When doing this project, it's best to use an old shower curtain liner to cover the floor or table where the children are working. You will need some white construction paper, tissue paper of various colors, paint, clear liquid glue (it is best if the glue can be applied with a paint brush), and paint brushes.

Before beginning the project you should discuss with your students what color papers they will need to make for their particular end-product: illustrations for their own original stories, a class mural, etc. After generating a list of shades, such as red, orange, reddish orange, black, gray, brown, brownish red, etc., your students will need to decide how many sheets of each shade they will need to blend to achieve the color effect they want. Working in groups of two or three, children can select a color they would like to make. Encourage them to keep track of the colors that are being produced to ensure enough of each color are made. The children will need to paint

the liquid glue onto the white construction paper and then glue down a sheet of tissue paper. When the tissue paper has dried each child can paint different textures on the paper. It may be necessary to allow the paint to dry in between colors or textures. When all the students have finished creating their own papers they should be housed in a large box for the entire class to use later.

Science Connections

Eric Carle will often add the most intricate details to his stories and these details are an excellent starting point for teaching children the skills of observation and predictions. In the stories *The Honeybee and the Robber*, *The Grouchy Ladybug*, and *Draw Me A Star*, there are many different details the children can observe and use to make predictions about what is going to happen.

When reading the story *The Honeybee and The Robber*, encourage the children to look for the Honeybee in the illustrations. On each page have them predict what is going to move on the page. This process can continue throughout the entire story.

In *The Grouchy Ladybug*, suggest to your students that they observe and see what happens to the sun, the words and the size of the pages throughout the story. If they are good at observing and noting changes they will quickly realize that as the day progresses the sun moves from the bottom of the page to the top and then back down again. The words and page size increase with the size of the animal the grouchy ladybug encounters.

In the story *Draw Me A Star*, the children can observe the changes that the artist undergoes throughout the story. The artist starts out as a young child and ends as an old man. You can also have your children predict what each object or animal will ask for in the story.

Writing Connections

Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear? and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* both lend themselves well to patterned writing activities. After reading these stories the children can then write their own stories using the same kinds of patterns. You may also wish to incorporate the other senses into the writing, too. Only your students' imaginations will set the limits to the possibilities of these stories. One of our students wrote this delightful "senses" story:

Boy, boy, what do you see?
I see a dog looking at me.
Dog, dog, what do you smell?
I smell a bone near my cat Nell.
Cat, cat, what do you hear?
I hear a mouse squeaking in fear.
Mouse, mouse, what do you taste?
I taste cheese, and there's no waste!
Cheese, cheese, what do you feel?
I feel a mouse chewing and
I'm his Meal!

Math Extensions

Rooster's Off to See the World is an engaging book that can be used for a problem-solving math activity. Read the story to your students the first time, asking them to pay close attention to the animals in the story. At the end of the story ask the children what they notice about the number of animals in the stories. Ask the children how many different animals are in the story? What are the different animals? How many cats, turtles, frogs, fish? How many all together? Introduce the concept of adding on animals as the rooster ventured further out into the world: one rooster plus two frogs and so on. Continue this process until you reach the point where all the animals have joined in the venture. The same process can be repeated using subtraction when the animals realize that they are ready to return home.

Once the children feel comfortable with the quantities discussed in the story they can begin to work on the following word problem, Marilyn Burns-style. If the rooster wanted to buy shoes for all his new friends how many would he need to buy? Invite the children to show how they solved the problem. Tell them they need to explain their work using either pictures, words, numbers, or any combination of these methods. If you are working with younger students the same results could be obtained by photocopying pictures of the animals represented in the book and having them glue the pictures on a larger piece of paper. Ask the children if they know how many feet are on their page. It is important to clarify with the children what feet are. Young children may not realize the fins on the fish are not feet! As a challenge to this activity for other students you could ask them: How many tails there are all together? How many tails and feet are there? If each animal brought a friend just like himself, how many feet would there be? How many tails? How many feet and tails all together?

Other Eric Carle stories that lend themselves well to math activities are:

- *The Grouchy Ladybug*: Telling time
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*: Counting and number recognition
- *1, 2, 3 to the Zoo*: Counting and adding all the animals together
- *What's For Lunch?*: Counting and number recognition

Social Studies/Multicultural Tie-Ins

Have You Seen My Cat? is an easy-to-read picture book that can be used with children in a variety of ways. Each page shows a young boy asking a different group of people if they have seen his cat. The children can guess what kind of cat will be shown by the clues given on the preceding page. Since each group of people is dressed in clothing that reflects the cat's native region, children can research where these countries are (using globes or atlases) and how they function in their habitats (books, CD-ROMs, etc.). Students can find similarities and differences between each cat's region and their own home. Reports can be written about the region, and the illustrations to accompany the reports can be made using colored tissue paper created using Eric Carle's techniques.