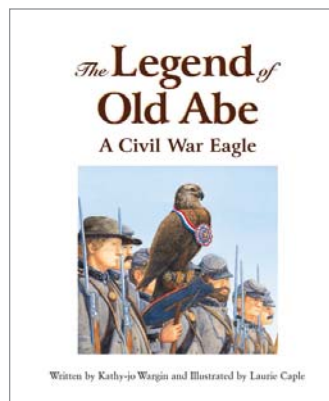
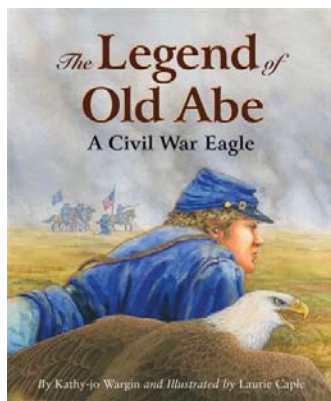


Thirty-Two Sheets of White

by Laurie Caple

Capturing the attention of a child and keeping it long enough to compel him to read is a noble task. Picture books are my artistic passion and I love the challenge of their sequential art form. They were developed, in part, to help children learn to read, and later refined to make them *want* to read. Large in format and generally containing only a few sentences per page, picture books rely heavily upon artwork, not to decorate the text, but to expand and enrich it... to help tell a story. They kindle a sense of wonder, spark a taste for history and provide an opportunity to explore a distant place or ignite a feeling we otherwise wouldn't know. And perhaps most importantly, they are often a child's introduction to a form of communication that has existed since early man first carved on the cave walls at Rouffignac... picture books are art.

Illustrators of this genre are highly selective of the manuscripts they commit to. Contemplating thirty-two blank sheets of white is daunting. The lengthy process of creating art for each of those pages can become tedious and dull so I only take on projects I have a fascination with. From the moment I first read *The Legend of Old Abe – A Civil War Eagle*, by Kathy-jo Wargin, I was mesmerized. Although it didn't initially fit into my schedule, I convinced my agent to find a way to make it work. Somehow. She did and although I didn't actually begin painting its pages for quite some time, my work began in earnest.



The Legend of Old Abe - A Civil War Eagle, was released in late July of 2006 by Sleeping Bear Press, an imprint of Thomson-Gale.

My creative process starts when the fax machine hum signals the arrival of each new manuscript I will immerse myself in for the next eight to ten months...sparse words on a white page that wouldn't garner a glance from most children. But these words were carefully, creatively chosen to enrapture, entertain and delight even the most reluctant reader... *if* I can provide enough visual intrigue to entice a child (or his parent!) to pause long enough to pick up this particular book to read.



The artist visited several Civil War reenactments to immerse herself in the era. The Mississippi heat she experienced during the Corinth reenactment inspired this particular scene of soldiers resting beneath a tree.

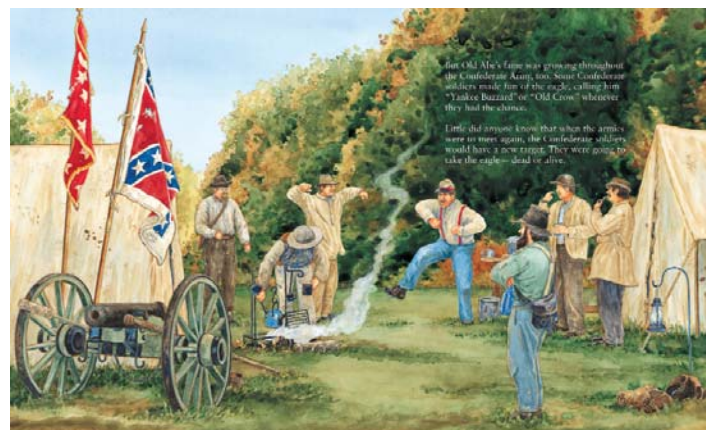
When I first ponder any manuscript, I jot notes in the margin for any images that pop into mind. Although I might not follow this initial direction of thinking, I often do. Creative ideas are fleeting and I want to capture every thought. The next phase is to delve completely into my subject. A picture book illustrator generally researches far deeper than anyone else involved in the book's production, including the author. Depicting the Civil War era required a tremendous amount of information gathering. Uniforms, musketry and battle flags changed as the war progressed. The coloration of Old Abe's feather pattern matured as the months passed. I needed to know the topography of the land his regiment passed through... the types of tents his troops slept in... the details of the perch he roosted on.



Civil War uniforms, flags, equipment and even horse breeds were specific to regions and time periods. Wisconsin Veterans Museum curator and former Civil War reenactor William Brewster provided the expert opinion that Caple needed to ensure accuracy.

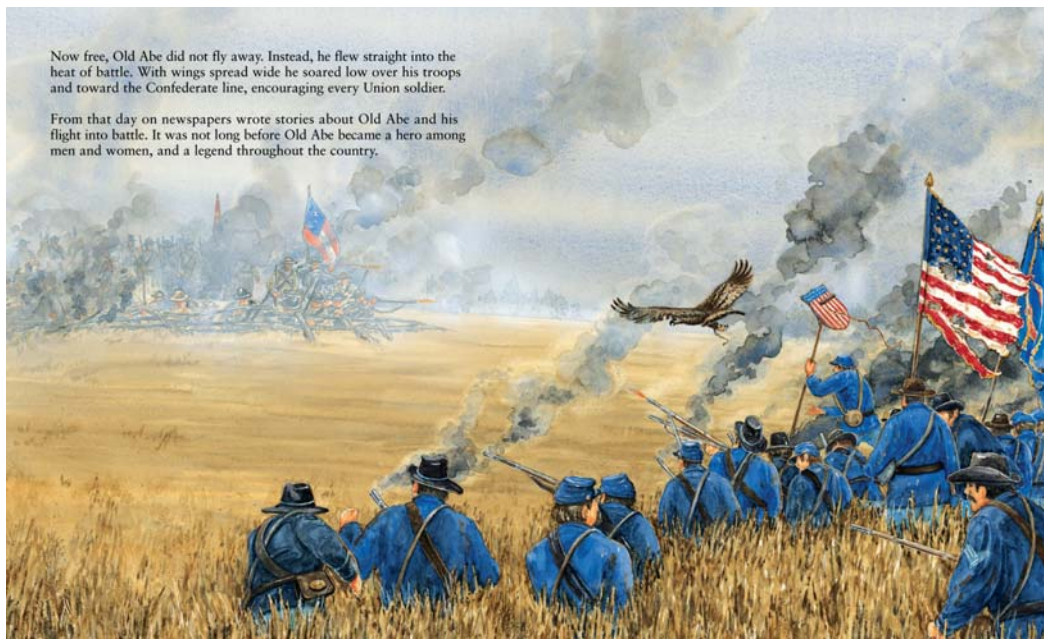
I visited Civil War reenactments in Mississippi, Wisconsin and Minnesota to gather a sense of the battlefield chaos... to smell the gun smoke... to see the burning haze suspended above the line of fire... to converse with the living historians whose passion for that era is reflected in their careful attention to historic detail in their costumes and mannerisms. I wanted to hear the bugle call and listen to the drummer boy's rhythmic beat as he tapped in time with the soldiers' steps. I wanted to taste the hard tack that sustained troops during lean times and feel the sun burning my back while I trudged the dusty roads. I photographed *everything*... horses tethered behind tents... tattered flags fluttering on wooden poles... cannons being dragged across rutted terrain. I hunkered down on the ground to photograph from behind field grass and lay flat on my back while looking up at muskets with bayonets attached. I briefly considered impersonating a soldier so I could wander the camps at night but felt it would disrespect the work of the true reenactors. If it were feasible to get an overhead view, I'd have investigated hiring a helicopter. I visited historical museums and read journals of individuals who actually lived in the camps and on the battlefields. I coerced friends to crawl through brush.... brandishing lacrosse sticks to mimic muskets. My youngest son blew notes on a vinegar bottle that I later transformed into

a bugle. I gathered anything that gave me a sense of living in that time element so my paintings could be more truthful and real. And perhaps most important of all, I found an expert from the Civil War era. William Brewster, curator of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum and a former Civil War reenactor, reviewed all my sketches and gave numerous suggestions about battlefield configurations, conversion flint locks for muskets, and even officers' saddles. Every book has a guardian angel of sorts and Bill became Old Abe's.



Family members and neighbors often pose as models and the artist called upon her husband to portray the Confederate soldier mocking Old Abe in this scene.

Picture book illustrating is unique in that each double-page spread is viewed singularly, yet must flow with the whole. It is imperative to pace things so a child's interest is piqued and sustained... almost like cinema. I created a storyboard for *The Legend of Old Abe* so I could assess all these elements together. I pasted small color studies in sequential order on a 32" x 40" sheet of mat board so I could see the entire book at a glance. When creating picture book art, it is important to pause at impactful moments... to satisfy questions not explained in the text... to vary images so a child is compelled to turn the page to discover what happens next. I often face my directional movement from left to right... to propel the page turning, but sometimes I want the reader to slow down. The battle scenes in *Old Abe* depict the Union soldiers facing "backwards" and to the left. This creates a tension... an unsettling place to pause so the impact of the text can be absorbed.



Now free, Old Abe did not fly away. Instead, he flew straight into the heat of battle. With wings spread wide he soared low over his troops and toward the Confederate line, encouraging every Union soldier.

From that day on newspapers wrote stories about Old Abe and his flight into battle. It was not long before Old Abe became a hero among men and women, and a legend throughout the country.

During the Civil War, it was not uncommon for Army units to have live animals as mascots for their troops. These mascots helped lift spirits and build loyalty among the soldiers. Captured from his nest in the pine forests of northern Wisconsin, a bald eagle nicknamed "Old Abe" rallied his comrades through numerous battles and skirmishes, soaring overhead with wings outstretched.



Pulling in close and also using the power of directional line in the snapping tether, drifting gunsmoke and musket positions are some of the techniques the artist uses to create tension in this watercolor.

Creating a picture book is a team effort and different individuals are involved at different stages. People are surprised to learn that authors generally aren't given any input into the selection of an artist nor do they provide any input in the artist's creative process. But we all have the same goal. Whether writing the story, determining font style, formulating a marketing plan or developing mood in a painting, we all want to create a book that children will be drawn to and remember. Although I'd already conversed with my editors and art director about what direction the *Old Abe* illustrations should take, viewing the "book dummy" was the first time they actually saw any of my work. A book dummy is a compilation of all 32 pages of full-sized sketches with text in place. It is the final preparatory step before finished art is begun. It is where we join in a huddle to fine-tune our game plan. Rarely are changes made in direction after the dummy is approved and final paintings begun.

Watercolor is tremendously popular among children's book illustrators. It is my medium of choice. There's an imaginative quality to the flow of paint and its translucent glow. Although I paint in a detailed style, it isn't necessary to



Selecting the right paper is critical to the success of the artist's watercolors. Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Vellum provides a lightly textured surface that is perfect for rendering tight detail yet has the versatility and strength to handle the application of multiple layers of paint and wet-on-wet washes.

illustrate each feather or blade of grass. I can just suggest them with broader strokes of color. As I created value and color studies, it became clear that *Old Abe* begged for a richness and depth... a power in the color. That required laying down more layers of paint and several months passed as I worked to achieve the right mood and feel. *The Legend of Old Abe* was just published in late July of this year and I look forward to seeing the combined effort of many unite to form a brand new book. But in the meantime, I've moved on and am currently researching giant sea reptiles from the dinosaur era. My own sense of wonder is piqued and yes, I've found a guardian angel for this book as well... Dr. Benjamin Kear, an Australian scientist at the University of Adelaide who shares my passion for sea turtles that swam in ancient waters 110 million years ago.



ABOUT THE ARTIST Laurie Caple

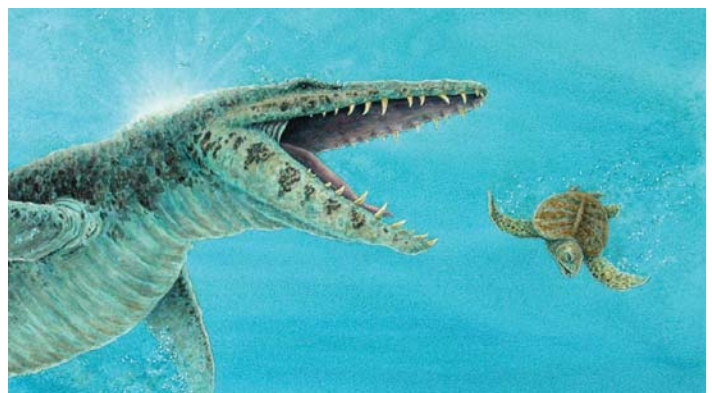
A fondness for both nature and history provides the inspiration behind watercolorist Laurie Caple's artwork. Raised in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, she was an avid explorer of nearby forests and wetlands. She has created illustrations

for seventeen books in addition to numerous periodicals, including *American Girl* and *Cricket*. Laurie is currently working on a new picture book, "Giant Sea Reptiles of the

Dinosaur Age", for publisher *Clarion Books*, an imprint of *Houghton Mifflin*. She has served as artist-in-residence for Hamline University's *Center for Global Environmental Education* and also as creative consultant for the award-winning television program for children, *Once Upon a Tree*. She recently teamed with Caldecott Honor medallists Ted & Betsy Lewin to create artwork on display in New York's *Central Park Wildlife Center*. She is represented by Marcia Wernick of the *Sheldon Fogelman Agency* in New York.

Kirkus, in a pointed review, commented recently, "Beautifully painted watercolors make this book particularly pleasing to pore over" and "All illustrations expertly painted by Caple". *Booklist* wrote, "Appealing watercolor paintings, attractive presentation". *School Library Journal* noted, "Surprisingly beautiful" and "Excellent quality watercolor paintings appear throughout".

Ms. Caple lives atop a wooded hill in northern Wisconsin with her husband and two sons. Her studio overlooks a small, untamed lake where she delights in observing many forest creatures including black bear, otter and bald eagles. When not painting, she can be found hiking and photographing nature or experimenting with pastels. Laurie believes every child is talented, original, and has something important to say through creative expression. Frequently invited to speak in elementary schools, she has also been instrumental in initiating many gallery shows honoring children's art.



Detail from a watercolor-in-progress depicting the pleiosaur *Kronosaurus queenslandicus* and a sea turtle, *Notochelone*. From the forthcoming book, *Giant Sea Reptiles of the Dinosaur Era*, to be published in 2007 by *Clarion Books*, an imprint of *Houghton Mifflin*.

The Paper Ladder: Selecting a Sheet for Your Work

Before commercial art entered the computer era, you could track the progress of an ad proposal from start to finish by the type of paper on which it was drawn. Brainstorming rough ideas might get sketched on newsprint and the more likely candidates would advance to Sketch paper or, if worthy of presentation to the client, to Bristol board.

Few if any agencies still use the hand-drawn approach today. Computers have enabled proposals to be expediently mocked up, refined and distributed without ever staining a sheet of paper with ink or pencil.

But paper retains an important role in the fine arts, where concepts progress from draft to masterpiece on a similar progression of paper types. Unlike commercial art, fine art is about process, the interaction between artist and expression, media and surface. There's little point, so to speak, to using a computer mouse.

As the artist's concept advances with each new iteration, the selection of a suitable paper grows more important and, depending on the media used, more complex.

Newsprint, for example, offers a simple sheet for simple ideas. It is clearly not intended for archival art. Rather, its relatively low cost helps lighten the economic impact for developing artists and early trial and error sketches. Newsprint's relatively soft surface is also suitable for experimenting with charcoal and other dry media. Although good for sampling ideas, newsprint's surface is less forgiving of errors or extensive rework.



A wiser choice for early trial and error work is Sketch paper, which is another inexpensive, lighter weight option for developing ideas. Sketch paper offers a higher quality surface than newsprint, with a more toothy finish for more confident art students. Its harder surface quality extends opportunities for experimentation in techniques beyond pencil and charcoal.

Drawing conclusions

There is a fine line dividing Sketch and Drawing paper... literally. Drawing paper comes in heavier weight sheets than Sketch, and offers a harder, more durable surface excellent for rendering fine, crisp, well-defined strokes with dry media, or pen and ink.

Although sheets made from high quality alpha cellulose wood pulp are standard grade, top end Drawing paper is made entirely from cotton fiber. The latter can withstand repeated erasures and rework without feathering or bleeding.

Drawing papers are further distinguished by whether they have a vellum, smooth or plate finish. The higher tooth of a vellum surface grabs and holds more pigment, bringing out bolder looking work. In contrast, a tightly woven smooth surface delivers cleaner-edged lines, making it an excellent candidate for pen and ink work.

For the ultimate smooth surface, artists opt for "plate." A true plate finish is made by taking sheets of Drawing paper or Bristol and interleaving the sheets with metal plates to form a book. The book is then put under mechanical pressure, causing the metal plates to press the sheets smooth. The resulting paper is ideal for technical drawing, pen and ink, airbrush and marker.

Although Sketch and Drawing paper can contribute toward an impressive finished piece, they are not the only choices for archival work. Many artists prefer to commit their fully evolved ideas to a sturdier surface. For them, the choice is either Bristol or Illustration Board.

Bristol provides two working surfaces, while Illustration board often provides only one: Strathmore's two-sided board is an exception. But where Bristol is often intended for archival pieces, work done on Illustration boards is frequently scanned or reproduced onto other mediums.

Bristol is named for the English county where it was first developed. It is made by pasting two or more Drawing sheets together, to form thicknesses from 2-ply up to 5-ply. Heavier boards are intended for watercolor or other wet media, but most artists are content with fewer plies.

Like the Drawing papers that comprise each ply, Bristol may be made from alpha cellulose or cotton fiber, or a mixture of both. Likewise, Bristol comes with either a vellum, smooth or plate finish, extending each finish's particular interactive surface qualities to wet media applications.

For example, a smooth or plate surface is favored by artists working with airbrush, or who use Bristol as an alternative to scanning images off of Illustration board. Conversely, vellum Bristol's slightly more textured surface is favorable to media applied by brush, such as watercolor, gouache, acrylic, and tempera.

No right answer

Like creative expression, paper can be a very personal matter. You may find several grades suitable to your work, depending on your preferred media, skill level and artistic method. Suppliers like Strathmore Artist Papers offers hundreds of products designed for beginner and advanced artists using a variety of media and techniques, along with selection guidelines based on over a hundred years of serving budding and expert artists alike.

In the end, the right choice is what works for you, and the solution may only come through experimenting with different papers.

You will find when buying Strathmore products that all of our grades offer high-quality materials and construction designed to deliver the best of your work at a cost you can afford.

Spotlight: Strathmore Website Debuts New Design

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Use the Free Online Print Center to design and print your own projects on our Digital Photo Papers. You can find the nearest retailer that carries Strathmore products with our Where to Buy store locator.

While you're there, check out our ever-expanding product line, including our new Kids Pads and Creative and Fine Art Cards. Visit often and stay up-to-date with the latest from Strathmore.

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