



Leo and Diane Dillon

TeachingBooks Original Movie Transcript

Leo and Diane Dillon, interviewed in their home in Brooklyn, New York on September 2, 2005.

Program available at www.TeachingBooks.net beginning December 2005.

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Leo: We met in Parson's School of Design. We sat next to each other and for three, four years we competed.

Diane: Bitterly.

Leo: Bitterly, yeah, true. Unfortunately or fortunately, we fell in love and decided that we couldn't spend any time away from each other.

Diane: We came on the concept of the third artist, which was a combination of the two of us who does something that neither one of us would do separately. When we look at a piece after we've finished it, it's impossible to figure out who did what.

Creating *Earth Mother*

Leo: We choose books because of the spiritualist quality of them, and if we find something in those books that resonates with us, that's the book we choose. *Earth Mother* tends to exemplify everything we're after in a children's book. It was a statement that all life is perfect. It might not be the way you want it to be, but if you just wait and accept it, all things come right.

Diane: It's a wonderful message. *Earth Mother* tells this story in so few words but says so much about acceptance and about not trying to change things or force people to be different than who they are.

Diane: When we're creating a book, we work from the first page to the last page. We don't jump around because we want that consecutive feeling of the passing of time, the time of day.

Leo: We begin with thumbnails, which are really our way of conversing with each other. We will do hundreds of thumbnails until we begin to get images that we really like, and then we'll expand on them into preliminary drawings.

Diane: And we use a blue pencil; we can almost sculpt with the pencil.

Leo: We started using the blue pencil because it had absolutely no character — an anonymous line.

Diane: Then we go for a finished drawing. And we begin to really put in detail, shading. And, then give it the wash of watercolor and refine constantly until we feel that it's finished.

Capturing Culture in Stories

Leo: We wanted to portray in *Ashanti to Zulu* that there are many different cultures and it's just not Africa as one big place, but that like the rest of the world, there are many, many cultures.

Diane: We decided that in each one of those pictures we'd include the dwelling, a man, a woman, a child...

Leo: Artifact...

Diane: Animal and some landscape...

Leo: And a bird.

Diane: Right.

Diane: *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* is very different because we did come in close and then...

Leo: ...you would get certain views that were very close up, that this way we could concentrate on the feeling of the characters.

Leo: I think that Virginia Hamilton is one of the greatest writers we have. To read a book of hers is to find out that there are things going on that you had absolutely no idea of under the sun.

Diane: Also, she did what we hope to do in our career, and that was to include people who'd never been included before in things like fairy tales and myths and fantasy.

Make Life an Art

Leo: We once heard a statement, to "make life an art." And that really intrigued us because it meant that if you cooked the meal, you should make that art. If you painted your rooms, make that art. Make art everything you touch and everything you do. That must be the ideal of life.

Books by Leo and Diane Dillon

- JAZZ ON A SATURDAY NIGHT, The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2006
- EARTH MOTHER (written by Ellen Jackson), Walker & Company, 2005
- BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH: BIRD TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD, (written by Howard A. Norman), Harcourt, 2004
- PEOPLE COULD FLY, THE: THE PICTURE BOOK (written by Virginia Hamilton), Knopf Books for Young Readers / Random House, Inc., 2004

- PORCELAIN CAT, THE (written by Michael Patrick Hearn), Milk & Cookies Press / distributed by Simon & Schuster, 2004
- WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? (written by Margaret Wise Brown), HarperCollins, 2004
- ABHORSEN (written by Garth Nix), HarperCollins, 2003 (Cover only)
- ONE WINTER'S NIGHT (written by John Herman), Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2003
- RAP A TAP TAP: HERE'S BOJANGLES — THINK OF THAT!, The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2002
- ENCHANTRESS FROM THE STARS (written by Sylvia Louise Engdahl), Walker & Company, 2001
- LIRAEAL (written by Garth Nix), HarperCollins, 2001 (Cover only)
- MANSA MUSA: THE LION OF MALI (written by Khephra Burns), Harcourt, 2001
- TWO LITTLE TRAINS (written by Margaret Wise Brown), HarperCollins, 2001
- GIRL WHO SPUN GOLD, THE (written by Virginia Hamilton), The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2000
- BLUISH (written by Virginia Hamilton), The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 1999 (Cover only)
- WIND CHILD (written by Shirley Rousseau Murphy), HarperCollins, 1999
- TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON: VERSES FROM ECCLESIASTES, The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 1998
- HER STORIES: AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLKTALES, FAIRY TALES AND TRUE TALES (written by Virginia Hamilton), The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 1995
- SABRIEL (written by Garth Nix), HarperCollins, 1995 (Cover only)
- WHAT AM I? LOOKING THROUGH SHAPES AT APPLES AND GRAPES (written by N. N. Charles), The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 1994
- MANY THOUSAND GONE: AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM (written by Virginia Hamilton), Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1993
- SORCERER'S APPRENTICE, THE (written by Nancy Willard), The Blue Sky Press / an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 1993
- NORTHERN LULLABY (written by Nancy White Carlstrom), Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1992
- PISH, POSH, SAID HIERONYMUS BOSCH (written by Nancy Willard), Harcourt, 1991
- MIRIAM'S WELL: STORIES ABOUT WOMEN IN THE BIBLE (written by Alice Bach), Delacorte Press, 1991
- TALE OF THE MANDARIN DUCKS, THE (written by Katherine Paterson), Gollancz, 1990
- COLOR WIZARD, THE (written by Barbara Brenner), Bantam Books, 1989
- MOSES' ARK: STORIES FROM THE BIBLE (written by Alice Bach), Delacorte Press, 1989
- PEOPLE COULD FLY, THE: AMERICAN BLACK FOLKTALES (written by Virginia Hamilton), Knopf Books for Young Readers / Random House, Inc., 1985
- THE GATHERING (written by Virginia Hamilton), Greenwillow Books / an imprint of HarperCollins, 1981 (Cover only)
- CHILDREN OF THE SUN (written by Jan R. Carew), Little, Brown, 1980
- DUSTLAND (written by Virginia Hamilton), Greenwillow Books / an imprint of HarperCollins, 1980 (Cover only)
- TWO PAIRS OF SHOES (written by P. L. Travers), Viking, 1980
- TALES FROM SCANDINAVIA (written by Frederick Laing), Silver Burdett Company, 1979
- JUSTICE AND HER BROTHERS (written by Virginia Hamilton), Greenwillow Books / an imprint of HarperCollins, 1978 (Cover only)
- WHO'S IN RABBIT'S HOUSE (written by Verna Aardema), Dial Books, 1977

- ASHANTI TO ZULU: AFRICAN TRADITIONS (written by Margaret Musgrove), Dial Books, 1976
- HUNDRED PENNY BOX, THE (written by Sharon Bell Mathis), Viking Press, 1975
- SONG OF THE BOAT (written by Lorenz B. Graham), Crowell, 1975
- WHY MOSQUITOES BUZZ IN PEOPLE'S EARS: A WEST AFRICAN TALE (retold by Verna Aardema), Dial Books for Young Readers, 1975
- BURNING STAR (written by Eth Clifford), Houghton Mifflin, 1974
- SONGS AND STORIES FROM UGANDA (written by W. Moses Serwadda), Crowell, 1974
- THIRD GIFT, THE (written by Jan R. Carew), Little, Brown, 1974
- WHILWIND IS A GHOST DANCING (written by Natalia Maree Belting), Dutton, 1974
- BEHIND THE BACK OF THE MOUNTAIN: BLACK FOLKTALES FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA (retold by Verna Aardema), Dial Books, 1973
- GASSIRE'S LUTE: A WEST AFRICAN EPIC (written by Alta Jablow), Dutton, 1971
- UNTOLD TALE, THE (written by Erik Christian Haugaard), Houghton Mifflin, 1971
- RING IN THE PRAIRIE, THE: A SHAWNEE LEGEND (written by John Bierhorst), Dial Books, 1970
- WHY HEIMDALL BLEW HIS HORN: TALES OF THE NORSE GODS (written by Frederick Laing), Silver Burdett Company, 1969
- DARK VENTURE (written by Audrey White Beyer), Alfred A. Knopf, 1968
- RIDER AND HIS HORSE, THE (written by Erik Christian Haugaard), Houghton Mifflin, 1968
- CLAYMORE AND KILT: TALES OF SCOTTISH KINGS AND CASTLES (written by Sorche Nic Leodhas), Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967

Note: *Bibliography created in December 2005.*

Many thanks to the folks at Walker Books in their help for this program, particularly Beth Eller for her encouragement and support.

Thanks, as well, to Gretta Miller, Aarick Beher, Rich Matheson, MJ Baumann and all at Clotho Advanced Media, Inc for their invaluable, professional help with this production.

Of course, this entire Author Up-close program occurred because of the kindness and generosity of Leo and Diane Dillon, who shared their home, time and energy with me in order to make this production.

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