



Denise Fleming

TeachingBooks Movie Transcript

Denise Fleming, interviewed in her studio in Toledo, Ohio on May 20, 2002.

This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.

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My books are created by pulp painting, which is a papermaking technique.

This is my palette [*while dipping hands in buckets of colored pulp*]. I have cotton-like fiber floating in water. I pour that onto a screen. The water drains through. The cotton fiber stays on top of the screen. And to get the different images, I either draw with the fiber in a squeeze bottle, or I cut stencils and fill in the stencil shape with a different colored fiber. So it's actually building layer on top of layer of fiber.

On Book Design

I design my own books from beginning to end. I pick everything from the font or the type that I use to the size of the book. In *Pumpkin Eye*, I loved that typeface because it looked like chunks of pumpkin cut out.

The pictures are full of high contrast, bright colors, but very close up because I want to get really close to things and touch them. So I do the pictures that way. You notice I don't step way back in my books. It's like you're right there, part of it. *In the Tall, Tall Grass* was the first book that I wrote and illustrated in the papermaking technique. I'll see young children actually try to pick the caterpillar up off the page.

In the Tall, Tall Grass and *In The Small, Small Pond* — they're a nice, square, big size. So when you open them up, you have this kind of panoramic view.

Concept Books

Count is about counting, of course, but I wanted it to be a loud book. I tried to use short, brief phrases that young children hear all the time: "Share!" "Line up!" and they'd be the ones giving the command. "Jump Zebras!" "No, no crocodiles!" In *Count* I went from one to ten and then into tens because it is so exciting when you're little to be able to count by tens. That is like the big kids do.

In *Mama Cat Has Three Kittens*, there is that refrain, "Boris naps. When Mama Cat washes her paws, Fluffy and Skinny wash their paws. Boris naps. When Mama Cat walks the stone wall, Fluffy and Skinny walk the stone wall. Boris naps." With young children they love that because,

after you read the first couple of pages, they know what is coming. So they know they can jump in. It is that joyful feeling of being a part of it.

I love words, and certain words just feel good when you roll them around in your mouth. “Crunch, munch, caterpillar’s lunch” as opposed to, “The caterpillars ate their way through the tall, tall grass.” I am saying the same thing, but it doesn’t have the same punch.

Lunch, at first look, appears very simple because it is very simple graphics, very simple text. But as you open the book, it is white — which is all colors. As you go through the book, it goes through the colors of the spectrum, and it ends on black — which is absence of color.

I wanted to do something with an alphabet. I thought that mouse from *Lunch* had a creative side, so I brought him back and had him build the alphabet (in *Alphabet Under Construction*). He buttons the B. I love buttons, so he’s got all of these beautiful buttons he’s collected, and he’s got all of these pieces of fabric, and he’s buttoning everything together.

I really wanted to do a book that has everything in it, everything I think is important for a young child to know — finger games, rhymes, colors, shapes, numbers, little poems about traffic lights. And I hid those one hundred and nineteen ladybugs in there (in *The Everything Book*).

In *Where Once There Was a Wood*, what I wanted to share is the loss of wild space, that we just can’t get it back. Once it is gone, it is gone. All those wild creatures have to find somewhere else to live. I collected all sorts of organic materials from a particular piece of land and added it to the white space, the white paper. Within these illustrations, added to the paper, there are leaves from the woods. There are fern fronds, cattail leaves and cattail fluff added.

In *Time to Sleep* I wanted to put all the senses in there. “Bear sniffs once; she sniffs twice; she smells winter in the air. Snail feels the frost on the grass. Ladybug hears the geese honking goodbye.” Each creature, before they can go to sleep, before they can rest for the winter, they have to tell someone else that it is time to go to sleep. It is that passing it on, you know, being responsible for somebody else.

That’s really what my books are about — just the joy of being alive and being a part of it all.

Books written and illustrated by Denise Fleming using her pulp painting technique:

- COW WHO CLUCKED, THE, Henry Holt and Company, 2006
- FIRST DAY OF WINTER, THE, Henry Holt and Company, 2005
- BUSTER, Henry Holt and Company, 2003
- ALPHABET UNDER CONSTRUCTION, Henry Holt and Company, 2002
- PUMPKIN EYE, Henry Holt and Company, 2001
- EVERYTHING BOOK, THE, Henry Holt and Company, 2000
- MAMA CAT HAS THREE KITTENS, Henry Holt and Company, 1998
- TIME TO SLEEP, Henry Holt and Company, 1997
- WHERE ONCE THERE WAS A WOOD, Henry Holt and Company, 1996
- BARNYARD BANTER, Henry Holt and Company, 1994
- IN THE SMALL, SMALL POND, Henry Holt and Company, 1993
- COUNT!, Henry Holt and Company, 1992
- LUNCH, Henry Holt and Company, 1992
- IN THE TALL, TALL GRASS, Henry Holt and Company, 1991

Note: Bibliography created in 2003.

Many thanks to the folks at Henry Holt for supporting this production. Specifically, Lori Benton and Andrea Wilk, who first introduced me to Denise.

Gretta Miller, Rich Matheson, Jon Henry, MJ Baumann and all at Clotho Advanced Media, Inc provided invaluable, professional help with this production.

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

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