



David Macaulay

TeachingBooks Movie Transcript

David Macaulay was interviewed in his studio in Rhode Island on August 14, 2001.

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.

Because this is a transcript of an edited movie, it should not be used as an assessment of Mr. Macaulay's writing. Many of the sentences found here were edited, and all editing decisions are the sole responsibility of TeachingBooks.net.

One of the great things about drawing, as an exercise, is that you really are forced to look at what's in front of you. And you don't just draw the superficial. You start to understand what's inside.

[While drawing a lawn sprinkler, David Macaulay makes the following comments....] Let's say the lawn sprinkler from *The Way Things Work*. What I wanted to do was take this one and sort of get you inside, show you what happens. Here comes the hose. . .here is this big water wheel. . .

I built it huge, out of scale. I built a lawn sprinkler that you could walk into. The water comes in here and it pushes the wheel, so it starts to turn like that. This thing is connected to some gears.

I wanted you to see how the inner workings went together, but also because I wanted you to say, "Wow, this is a fantastic thing."

The great thing about drawing is that you really do concentrate your eyes and your mind, for some period of time, on whatever the subject is that you're trying to draw. The water comes up here, and once it has turned this, it sort of comes back through here, and squirts the garden.

One of the things an illustrator can do, when they're trying to explain something, is put the reader wherever he or she wants the reader to be, to make the information more accessible, to make it more fun, to make it more engaging.

On Building Big

Among the biggest questions are why are these things built, first of all, and secondly, how are they built – what is the process. That's the part that really interests me, and that's the part that has always interested me. How do you get that thing there?

[While looking at a variety of original drawings on dams from *Building Big* . . .] The river is flowing in this direction. Now, they'll tunnel in here, straight across, and that means that if they put a dam here, the river can go this way.

So you have to go back to ask yourself what's the purpose, what's the need, what are the questions, and then it's question after question after question after question.

Here is that drawing that I just showed you, right there. Here's the whole dam.

And, eventually, when you've answered them all, this thing, this structure, this dam, this skyscraper, this domed mosque, begins to take shape and you understand why it looks the way it does. In *Building Big*, as in all the architectural books, it's this logical process that I'm trying to get to and trying to explain.

On Information Books

The key behind all of the books I do, particularly with the information books, there's a sense of curiosity. I've always had it and I've always been willing to keep asking questions until I understood the larger picture.

When I choose a subject, I choose a subject that interests me because I know that I'm going to be with it for a long time. So you read. You visit the sites. I photograph a lot. I'm sketching a lot. I have sketchbooks filled with notes from various trips. I sometimes make models of things to help me understand how things go together. I have a microscope. I have a library. It really is important to me that when I produce a book that is supposed to have information in it, that that information be reliable. That's critical.

On Picture Books

The picture books that I do tend to rely not exclusively, perhaps, but very heavily on the pictures. I want people to read pictures. I want them to really look at the pictures, which is why I will sometimes say something, in a very short sentence, that is not shown, or I will show something that's not said. So if you don't go back and forth between the words and the pictures, you're not going to understand at the end of the story what happened. So I want my readers to be as visually sensitive as they are verbally.

[Showing original art from *Angelo*....] This is Angelo. This is the main character of the new book. I've done *Angelo* because I enjoy the challenge of trying to tell a story. Trying, in this case for the first time, of creating a character that you can really empathize with, somebody you would care about. I've never done this before, and it's very hard. I've tried to find a balance in this book that makes you care about the two characters, this old man and this pigeon, but there also is enough silly stuff going on in the drawings that it never becomes too sweet, too saccharine.

Black and White was an idea of a journey through a book was something that intrigued me...people taking journeys and meeting and crossing paths and things of that nature.

[While showing his sketchbook from creating *Black and White*....] And here are some cows in a field, looking down on the field, but the gate is open....

This is a simple collection of four related stories or one story broken down into four separate fragments, from different points of view, emphasizing the differences by giving each its own name, using a different medium for each of the four stories, a different sort of emphasis and focus, a different character. So I did everything I could to visually separate them, but, in the end, it's one book. It's one large complex story, like life.

Books by David Macaulay

- ANGELO, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002
- BUILDING BIG, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000
- BUILDING THE BOOK CATHEDRAL, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999
- NEW WAY THINGS WORK: REVISED EDITION, THE, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998
- ROME ANTICS, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997
- SHORTCUT, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995
- SHIP, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993
- BLACK AND WHITE, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990
- WAY THINGS WORK, THE, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988
- WHY THE CHICKEN CROSSED THE ROAD, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987
- BAA, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985
- AMAZING BRAIN, THE (written by R. Ornstein & R. Thompson), Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984
- MILL, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983
- HELP! LET ME OUT (written by David Lord Porter), Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982
- UNBUILDING, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980
- MOTEL OF THE MYSTERIES, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979
- GREAT MOMENTS IN ARCHITECTURE, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978
- CASTLE, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977
- UNDERGROUND, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976
- PYRAMID, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975
- CITY: A STORY OF ROMAN PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974
- CATHEDRAL: THE STORY OF ITS CONSTRUCTION, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973

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