We took that detour into color to give you a heads-up that you will *paint* your illustration.

We’ll come back to color and painting again. But now we have to go back to our scribble sketches.

Do you remember them? It was a long time ago.
That scribbled Energy caught in a space the size of a kids’ sticker…?

“The truth” of your scene dashed off in a few seconds.

Not a “representation.”

Like in this scary moment from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, when young Jack Hawkins perches in the crow’s nest of the ship, while the pirate Israel Hands climbs up after him with a knife...

The gesture is the verb of your illustration.
Here’s a different Jack -- from *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

He’s bolting with the giant’s harp while the giant sleeps at the castle dinner table. (See the sleeping giant? Well, you’re not supposed to be able to recognize him...)

Think of the thumbnail as the *kinesthetic shorthand* for your story scenes.
In future sessions we’ll talk about a whole another kind of drawing that you’ll do in your illustration.

It will be the antithesis of the gesture, in a way.

You’ll put the two together in the end.
But let’s get back to the gesture.

Make it small and put that frame around it. (It’s an artist’s job – providing the viewfinder for your scene.)

The *scribble* you do in the frame determines how you ‘carve up’ this enclosed space.

Where stuff is happening and where nothing is happening in the space.

What is foreground and what is background.

Where the positive and negative charges are.
Here is Rip Van Winkle, from the 1809 story by Washington Irving.

Rip is an idler who wanders off into the Catskills Mountains to get away from his nagging wife for a while.

There he fraternizes with the ghosts of Henry Hudson’s crew, drinks some of their liquor and falls asleep under a tree. He won’t wake up for another 20 years.

I prefer the bottom thumbnail because it feels closer in. The shapes seem to do more, say more. Rip appears to be more in a deep sleep. The dog’s ears are turned down, so he’s more like a hunting hound patiently waiting for his master to wake up.
Here’s a good one:

*Don Quixote* and his sidekick *Sancho Panza*, by Pablo Picasso.

Do you think they’re about to do some windmill tilting...?
For pages in your thumbnails that have words, think of the *text block* as part of your thumbnail design and include it in your gesture.

Do your gesture in a split-flash, without any crutches.

With practice, you’ll grow more confident in your instant compositions, and it will start to be fun.

You’ll feel better about improvising.

It may even start to feel suspiciously *effortless* to you.
But, if you’re not supposed to use any reference, if you can’t *copy anything*, what is it, exactly, you’re making a gesture of?

I wondered when you were going to ask that.

It’s the gesture of what you see in your mind’s eye.

It’s “Let’s pretend.”

It’s the *impulse* of the *scene* you imagine. You act out the scene.

The way children do when they play.
The great illustrator and teacher Howard Pyle said that illustrators are “actors” who portray the characters in their scenes.

He meant it seriously. You have to be each character.
And feel what they feel --- their every stress, emotion and impulse -- in your body when you draw them.

So here’s what I say: Don’t confuse yourself with the facts (yet.)

*Experience* your scenes before you research them.

*Reference* at this thumbnail stage is irrelevant.

Some artists and animators glance at their mirrors to capture what they see when they’re “being who they’re drawing.”

Don’t you do that yet.

*Avoid* external reference.
Writers do this.

Charles Dickens “became” all of his characters when he performed his books on stage.

Because he was really “living” his scenes, his audiences lived them, too.

Wouldn’t it have been something to see?

You can bet that he did that when he was writing the scenes, too.

If you don’t know how to translate your scene into a little gesture scribble, just do the best you can.
It’ll be fine (better than you think.)

Your thumbnail is only a prelude to your larger, “real” drawing that a lot more people will be looking at.

The larger drawing will go into your dummy and it will be the basis for the painting that is the ‘final art’ in the published book.
Here’s a dummy by the late Barbara Cooney for *The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree*. (Today it’s in the Northeast Children’s Literature Collection at the University of Connecticut.)

The *dummy* is a mock-up of your book, with actual pages in it that a reader turns.

It’s like a manufacturer’s prototype, with working parts.

Mrs. Cooney was a two-time Caldecott winner. She liked to pull out all of the stops with her dummies, creating them in glorious full color, so she and her editors could get a good idea how the finished book might look.
The legislature of Maine declared her a “Treasure of the State”! You can read more about her at this website:

http://www.ortakales.com/illustrators/Cooney.html

Gone are those Golden Years when the industry was small, everyone knew each other and dummies were created with paint and fabric swatches and lovingly crafted, hand assembled, with ribbon stitching.

Some artists still produce dummy books as *objets d’art* in their own right. A few editors still get excited by them.

But the real test for a dummy is simply how the drawings and the story unfold together while those pages are turned.

Barbara Cooney’s color dummies could exquisitely pass this test.

Your dummies probably should pass this test in simple black and white.
Here’s a dummy for a 16 page early-reader for the school market. The drawings are brush and ink over pencil. Dummies are most often two-sided photocopies of pencil drawings. (See the staples on the left edge?)

Here’s the book. You see this dummy and book are the same size. They also share the same drawings, except for the book, the drawings have been transferred to watercolor paper and painted.
To see the details on the images better, go to the little percentage window in the PDF tool bar (top), click on the down arrow and select a higher percentage, like 150 or 200 percent, to enlarge the view.
The dragon twirls and turns
and rolls its eyes.
It dances on a hundred feet...
The dummy is an important sales tool (for you to ‘sell’ your book to an editor, and for her to sell it to her company’s sales and administrative staff...)

You can also see how the line drawings of the dummy function as blueprints for the paintings of the final book.

The *dummy* drawings are not the same as the thumbnail gestures that came out of your imagination and muscles and feelings.

Instead the dummy drawings recreate the patterns that a child recognizes.

The dummy drawings present a story in familiar shapes that “read” and preserve the story’s spell.
Here’s a secret: Most illustrators don’t know how to draw the shapes of everything ‘out of their heads.’

They have to research their subjects. (It can take up half the job of an illustration.)

We didn’t do a lick of research for our thumbnail drawings.

There we were pulling out an inner truth about the action, the gesture that drove the scene (as much as we could imagine of it.)

Now we’re making the “real” drawing.

So we do need to know the facts:

Not to produce a scene with the reality of a photograph.

But to suggest some of the patterns a child knows, Enough that he can ‘fill in the rest’, and create his own world

Just like he does when he reads.
So you have to *research* the visual details of your scenes. Actually it’s more like a scavenger hunt.

You can break each picture down, if you like, into:

- Subjects, actors (to include: figures, body types, faces, expressions and attitudes, poses, physical behaviors, hairstyles, wardrobes and costumes, accessories worn, etc.)

- Setting (the backdrop and details to help you establish the place, time, era, mood etc.)

- Props (all those free-floating items you would worry about for a stage production if you were the stage manager – furniture, lamps, plates, car keys, cradle, toys briefcase, vegetables – whatever figures into the scene.)

Once you’ve got your list, you can go on your *vision quest*. 
Real life is a great place to start.
A field trip!

An excuse to get out of the house.

Bring your sketchbook, your camera, your Flip Cam!

You can

Go to the beach, if you have one.

Or the zoo.

Or the rodeo, or the 4-H show.

Or the pet show.

Or how about the park?
Or the kite flying contest in the park.
Or the pool.
The playscape.

Any museum.

Historic home tours.

The aquarium.

A Native American Pow-Wow.

Your children. Their stuffed animals, dolls, toys.

Your sister’s children.

The woods. The field.

Your amazing backyard.

Dance recital.

Civil War re-enactors doing their thing.

The mall.

...Go to a place that your story’s about.
Another example of *real life research* is finding performers.

*By that I mean a few game members* of your family or social tribe to strike a few poses while you sketch, photograph or camcord them.

If they prove to be poor (or unwilling) models, hire a cast from the community theater or children’s theater – to stage your story scenes while you snap your pictures. Make sure the parents and director are there. Make it a fundraiser for the group.

After you’ve wet your feet with some *real life scavenging*, you can extend your hunt to *pictures*

Illustrators once had to rely on their own “swipe files” or the picture files at their public libraries.

Now we have *Google Image Search* and *YouTube*. 
Videos/DVDs are a great source of visual information in movement. You can go forward or back to understand a gesture better. Or freeze frame or slow the motion down – and sketch from the screen.

Some of the country’s top illustrators do this! I know one who rents old Disney animations -- to study how the light from a fireplace falls in woodcutter’s cabin, for example. I know another who watched The Black Stallion and King of the Wild Brumbees over and over before painting a story of wild horses.

Don’t overlook your own DVD or video shelf. Or your bookshelf, or the bookshelf in your kids’ room. The art and painting “how-to” instruction books in your studio.

Books, magazines, catalogs, newspapers, your family photo albums and the entire World Wide Web are there for you.

If you live in any kind of college town, hang out in the stacks of the campus fine arts library.

Get re-acquainted with those Great Tradition painters. Steep yourself in the color and light of Bouguereau, the pristine interiors of Vermeer and the snowy townscapes of Brueghel.

Pore through the photography books, while you’re there.
In your town’s public library, the children’s section is one of the great hunting grounds for an illustrator. Pictures reign supreme here.

You can extract ‘the facts’ -- the objective information from them. But don’t copy the work of other illustrators and photographers.

A good reporter tracks down several different perspectives for a story.

Steal from one source and it is plagiarism; steal from three sources and it is research, someone once said. (I don’t know if she was an attorney, but it’s still a good thought.)

If you need pictures of a subject, amass different ones. Pull a little data from each and make your own image. That’s not copying. It’s what art does.

You’re entitled to the visual memes of our culture -- along with the photos you take and the sketches you make.

But if you’re ‘borrowing’ a face from a National Geographic photo, change him.

Change the shape of his chin. Or paint him in reverse, with the aid of a hand mirror.

Change the setting of the scene.
Steal how the light falls on the forms of his face. But give him a different nose, different eyes, a different hat. Put eyeglasses on him. Morph him.

Imagine yourself playing the *Mr. Potato Head* game.

Having the photo will give you confidence about faces in general. So you can be bolder to *invent*.

When illustrating for *Cobblestone* (for an assignment with 2-3 illustrations) I would make 100-200 photo copies from library books I’d checked out, after a day or two of snooping.

I found I would use the copies mainly for gestures or intangible “attitudes” that had nothing to do with the copied subjects.
Some illustrators work up their own small clay models for reference.

Sebastia Serra of Barcelona, Spain made these salty seadog shipmates to help him render his pictures for *A Pirate’s Night Before Christmas* (Sterling) by Austin, Texas poet Philip Yates.

With his 3-D creations by his drawing board, Serra could sketch his story characters from any crazy viewpoint he wanted.

Like a good buccaneer, he also seized a model of an 18th century sail ship to serve as his pirate vessel, which he depicts from a variety of intriguing angles in the book.
Texas artist Theresa Bayer creates little figurines and places them in tiny diorama stage sets that she constructs to help her paint her watercolor scenes and illustrations. She tells of her process at:

http://howtobeachildrensbookillustrator.wordpress.com/2008/05/28/diorama-to-the-rescue-creating-your-own-sculptural-reference/
Abandon the notion, if you have one, that good illustrators just know how to draw out of their heads.

A few artists have been able to draw some things out of their heads.

Western painter Charles Russell could draw a horse without looking at a picture.

He could make up a horse in any position or attitude – bucking, violently twisting, jumping, rearing up on back legs, or at absolute rest.

He had worked for years as an ordinary cowboy.
He rode horses, herded cattle with them, camped under the stars with them. He lived with them 24-7.

He had nothing but equines to look at all day long (and those great lonely Western vistas that he could paint so beautifully out of thin air.)

Today’s cowboy artists (to their credit) try to get out to see horses as often as they can. They take plenty of digital photos and make no apologies.

In truth, there have not been many Charlie Russells in the world.

But even Charlie Russell collected all the visual reference he could get his hands on. His studio in Great Falls, Montana stayed littered with Indian head-dresses and costumes, weapons, animal horns and ranching paraphernalia.
Michelangelo could draw figures out of his head. But this astonishing artist/sculptor/architect/poet who knew and understood structural anatomy as well as any artist who ever lived, believed in reference and used it all the time.

He posed models to help him work out his powerful compositions, including those he did for the Sistine Chapel.

Makes a beautiful thumbnail storyboard, doesn’t it?

(Think what he might have done with a digital camera.)
The great French Impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir, not as skilled in rendering the human form as Michelangelo, acquired a small wooden store mannequin to help him portray the occasional child (not this one, necessarily) in his lovely paintings.

It was not a very good mannequin -- primitive and stiff and not especially life-or even child-like. (I got to see it at a touring exhibit at the Dallas Museum of Art.)

Inadequate as it was, Renoir clung to it for the rest of his career like a security blanket because he knew that he could not draw children out of his head. (It was in his studio when he died.)
Preparing to illustrate his classic true-life children’s tale *Make Way for Ducklings* (Viking Press), Robert McCloskey drew all the stuffed ducks he could find at the American Museum of Natural History.

The book went on to win the 1942 Caldecott Medal.

But the stuffed ducks weren’t enough for McCloskey, reports Nancy Hands in her excellent work *Illustrating for Children* (Prentice Hall.)

So he did anatomical drawings of ducks from scientific books, Hands tells us.

But he still wasn’t satisfied. So he interviewed an ornithologist to learn all he could about duck physiology and habits.

But he needed more.

So he purchased several baby ducks and brought them home “so he could follow them around on his hands and knees, drawing continuously,” Hands writes. He imagined himself with webbed feet, looking up at the giant confusing world the way a baby duck might.
McCloskey’s lithographs are almost cartoons. But they’re waddling, wiggling, alive and truthful. They’re funny, too, in the way that baby animals can be funny.

In fact they’ve become iconic – McCloskey’s family of feathered swimmers crossing a busy uptown street. (In the book it was Boston.)

And now we know how he did it. He got right down on the floor with those baby ducks.

The more reference you pull around you, the freer you are to draw.

You don’t have to actually use any of it.

Change and rearrange as you go. But help yourself to all the mosaic pieces of this world, real and virtual.

In your vision quest, you’ll make hundreds of delightful decisions about how to find the details you need, which ones to use, and how you’ll use them.

The selections you make won’t be random, but part of your unique personal expression, your style.

This is your “hidden work” as an illustrator.
Your *homefun*:

1.) Pick a *thumbnail* from your storyboard to make a full scale drawing from. Or, if you don’t have a storyboard yet, think of a scene from a public domain story like a fairy tale, or any story you’re imagining.

Pretend to be the characters in the scene. Hold their poses and feel their impact on you. Make a small gesture sketch of what you “see” and feel.

OK, you’ve got your thumbnail.

2.) Take yourself out on your scavenger hunt for imagery for this scene. The more you get into this hunt, the more amazing your drawing will be.

But don’t draw yet. (Not this detailed scene anyway.) We have some things to talk about. Just get your pile of reference together.

In *Session Nine* you’ll learn about the *first line* that you probably should make in this drawing for your dummy.
Picture Book Submission Rules
For Dummies

The dummy is one part of your submission package, if you are trying to sell a picture book story that you have written and you want to illustrate it.

You’ll probably also want to include in your package:

1.) A manuscript in the standard ms. format that a writer would submit if he was sending in just the story. “Standard ms. format” means white paper, one inch margins all around. Text in a plain, legible font.
   Lines double spaced. Your name and contract information, and the story title on the front page.
   You know the drill. School book report-style.
   But Pages paper-clipped together.
   (However your dummy book can be stapled.)

2.) A short cover letter, telling them who you are and what your book is. Don’t pack it with too much information. Your note is mainly there to humanize or personalize your submission.
   (But don’t be shy if you have something remarkable to tell them that relates to your submission.)

3.) A couple of full color illustrations for the story (prints, scans, photocopies – not originals) as samples of your “finished art style.” These can be of your cover and inside illustrations or a couple of inside illustrations.
   (It’s where so many aspiring illustrators fall down, and it’s the focus of this course.)

4.) Don’t forget your dummy.

Remember to check your Artists’ Submission Guidelines and other resources for additional tips a specific publisher has.
Make Your Splashes; Make Your Marks:
The power course on creating great drawings for books, magazines and other media for children
Content © Copyright 2008 by Mark Mitchell

Pirates dividing treasure by Howard Pyle