



## QUENTIN BLAKE



### EARLY LIFE

He was born in the suburbs of London in 1932 and has drawn ever since he can remember. He went to Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School, followed by National Service. Then he studied English at Downing College, Cambridge, going on to do a postgraduate teaching diploma at the University of London, followed by life-classes at Chelsea Art School.

### CAREER AS AN ILLUSTRATOR

He has always made his living as an illustrator, as well as teaching for over twenty years at the Royal College of Art, where he was head of the Illustration department from 1978 to 1986. His first drawings were published in *Punch* magazine while he was 16 and still at school. He continued to draw for *Punch*, *The Spectator* and other magazines over many years, while at the same time entering the world of children's books with *A Drink of Water* by John Yeoman in 1960.

He is known for his collaboration with writers such as Russell Hoban, Joan Aiken, Michael Rosen, John Yeoman and, most famously, Roald Dahl. He has also illustrated classic books, including *A Christmas Carol* and *Candide* and created much-loved characters of his own, including Mister Magnolia and Mrs Armitage. Since the 1990s Quentin Blake has had an additional career as exhibition curator, curating shows in, among other places, the National Gallery, the British Library and the Musée du Petit Palais in Paris. In the last few years, he has begun to make larger-scale work for hospitals and healthcare settings in the UK and France where his work can be seen in wards and public spaces.

His books have won numerous prizes and awards, including the Whitbread Award, the Kate Greenaway Medal, the Emil/Kurt Maschler Award and the international Bologna Ragazzi Prize. Quentin Blake was created CBE in 2005, is an RDI and has numerous honorary degrees from universities throughout the UK. He received a knighthood for 'services to illustration' in the New Year's Honours for 2013, and became an Honorary Freeman of the City of London in 2015.

### ARTWORK

I do a freewheeling sort of drawing that looks as though it is done on the spur of the moment. However even a single drawing needs a certain amount of preparation and planning. Most of the time I need to do a rough in which I find out how people stand, what sort of expressions they have and how they fit on the page. For a sequence of drawings more planning is needed, and one needs to think of a number of questions at the same time (which is part of the interest of the job):

- Is the method and medium of this drawing suitable to the atmosphere of the book?
- What goes on which page? Do the actions carry on from one picture to another?
- Do the characters still look the same on each page?
- In the attempt to combine planning with an air of spontaneity I've employed various techniques of which the one I have found most successful, and have used for the last thirty years - making use of a light box!



## THE LIGHTBOX TECHNIQUE

On the light box I put the rough drawing I am going to work from, and on top of that a sheet of watercolour paper. Ready to hand is a bottle of waterproof black ink and a lot of scruffy-looking dip pens. Essentially each of these are flexible and scratchy, or a J nib, which is harder and broader.

What happens next is not tracing; in fact it's important that I can't see the rough drawing underneath too clearly, because when I draw I try to draw as if for the first time; but I can do it with increased concentration, because the drawing underneath lets me know all the elements that have to appear and exactly where they have to be placed. Normally I begin with the most difficult piece of the drawing - some particular facial expression, some particular gesture or stance - so that if I get that wrong, I don't have to repeat the whole of the drawing.

## DO YOU KEEP IMAGERY AROUND YOU TO REFERENCE IN YOUR WORK?

It's important to me not to have any imagery in the studio. The walls are white. It is my job to imagine whatever it is I am drawing. In the same way, I have only ever drawn from live models during Life Classes when I studied part-time at Chelsea School of Art. Everything I draw now comes from my own imagination.

## FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZJm6QXSOP4>

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## EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. What year did Blake receive his knighthood?
2. His most famous collaboration is with which author?
3. Where does everything he now draws, come from?
4. What year was he born?
5. What magazine where his first drawings published in?
6. What technique does Blake use to help him with his next drawing sequence?
7. What city was he born in?
8. What was Blake's school called?