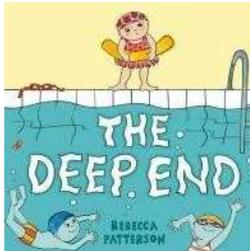


The Deep End By Rebecca Patterson (Published by Macmillan Children's Books)

Author and illustrator Rebecca Patterson explains what inspired her picture book, *The Deep End*, and talks about the creative process.



In *The Deep End*, a little girl is very daunted during her first swimming lesson but when she hears other children say that you can swim from the deep end all the way to the sea, learning to swim suddenly becomes much more enticing. Eventually, she manages to reach the deep end by herself (nearly).

Rebecca Patterson says:

"This book started with some sketches I had made after taking my children swimming. There is a glass-walled café where you can watch the children having their swimming lesson.

At one end of the pool I saw the over-inflated toddler group looking nervously at the older groups and what they were doing. It struck me as funny and I drew a picture of it. Then I saw the older group doing 'pencil jumps'; they were supposed to be as straight as a pencil and of course they were all over the place, no one looked like a pencil, so I drew that too and other sketches followed.



When I saw details of the Macmillan Children's Book picture book competition for art students, I went through my pictures. While I hadn't planned to write a story based on the swimming sketches, they reminded me of a Dr Seuss book I had read as a child, McElligot's Pool, where a boy is fishing in a pond and imagines it leads off to the sea. In my picture book, the children in the pool swim underground to the sea, so this is an 'homage' to Dr Seuss. I was obsessed with swimming pools as a child.

This was a very quick book to write and it was very easy because I did it to entertain myself and I was surprised – and pleased – that it made others laugh. I gave Macmillan a dummy and two finished spreads and they decided to publish the book – although I had to do lots and lots of work on it beforehand. I had no idea how much work is needed to get a book published! Redrawing illustrations can also be very tedious, but you just have to do it.

I had to make some changes, too, like the spread where the children turn into fish. Before, I had them turning into octopuses and other rather ugly sea creatures (see sketch, below) but the publisher thought that would be too scary so now they are pretty fish instead.



There are other issues you have to keep an eye on in picture books, like continuity. Your editors help you on that – checking the number of stripes on towels, for example. All the girls in my pictures had swimming badges and I had to check they always had the same number, in the same place. I had nine children altogether with different hats and swimming trunks or swimsuits, and that was tricky.

I like to have lots of different things on a page because it can get quite boring otherwise if the story is all seen in one place and you're just plodding through the book. There are also little things you can add – I have a plaster on every page in the pool, and there's a baby – for children to spot.

I did the pencil drawings for this story quite quickly and then put the watercolour on it, and then scanned the spreads into Photoshop to do the full colour work – Photoshop is a quick way of doing colour. For example, showing children underwater is quite easy in Photoshop, you just ping a bit of blue over the bits that are underwater.

However, I can only scan images up to A3 in size so I have to be very careful with my original drawings; they are much smaller than the finished book and I have to draw very carefully. Usually, when you are illustrating text, your pieces are bigger than the finished book and you would shrink the images down.

In every picture book you find you have to illustrate something that you've not done before and there were a few issues for me in this book. I was worried about doing the waves when the children are on the beach, I found that tricky. I also had to research what tube trains look like for the spread where children are swimming in the tunnel underwater. The mice you see in the tunnel were also very small and I had to draw those on the computer because of their size, and then blow them up in size to check the number of toes etc.

I love drawing people and always have done so I don't find them difficult, but in this book I found the perspective of the pool and the vending machine at the end difficult to get right. The pool perspective was tricky because it slopes and I am rubbish at perspective!

I also found I had to move the figures around in the pool to fit in the text. This is where Photoshop is very useful because you can just rub them out in Photoshop and drop them into another part of the picture.

One of my favourite spreads in the book is one of the last, the shower scene. I like the line of people, there was nothing to worry about for me – but the vending machine on the last page was awful! Perspectives again..."



Rebecca will be visiting a local school in Cambridge to help pupils create their own picture books. We will be following her progress on ReadingZone.com over the next few weeks.