

A Girl in Wolf's Clothing

Thesis Speech

By Audrey Shuman

Hello everyone, my name is Audrey Shuman, thank you so much for coming to my thesis defense presentation. I have created a 48-page self-ended picture book dummy about Lenora a shepherdess who turns into a werewolf. Her journey is a metaphor for chronic illness. She struggles with self-acceptance and denial about her new condition.

To start off I want to explain what a picture book dummy is. When pitching picture books to publishers' illustrators will create a mockup of what the book will look like with refined sketches and toned backgrounds. With only a couple finished pieces in the book to show what it will look like when finished. The book isn't fully finished so the publisher has plenty of room to make changes to the planned illustrations. This is what I have created for my thesis.

Before we get any farther let me show you my book:

(Reading of the Book)

Next, I want to talk about myself and what led me to creating this picture book.

I have known for around a year that I wanted to make a picture book dummy for my thesis. Since I took picture book 1 and I decided I wanted to illustrate picture books for my career. I love creating artwork that my childhood self would love so this project was the perfect choice for me.

I knew that I wanted to create a picture book that other chronically ill adults and children could relate to especially since it is a very isolating experience most of the time.

Once I knew that I wanted to use the shepherdess character and make it about chronic illness I realized I could have her transform into a werewolf, Since there are so many cultural connections with sheep and wolves. For me werewolves have always felt like a good metaphor for chronic illness as well as many other struggles/ stigmas people may face. For example, Remus Lupin from Harry Potter to me felt like he was managing a chronic condition, particularly with how affected his ability to go to work and how he viscerally lost control of his own body.

Visuals

Early in the process of ideation for this project I realized I wanted my story to be set in a fantasy world. Most of the art I make is fantasy and I wanted my story to not be bound by anything in the real world. For example, I wanted the sheep to not look exactly like real world sheep. They have different ears, tails, and all

different kinds of horns. The werewolves also have non-traditional tails. To me the sheep feel more like characters than animals in my story, they can read maps and easily break into houses.

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Another important element that I wanted to add to my book was decorative borders. Some of my favorite picture books like *Drawn Onward*, *The Truth about Dragons* and *The Mitten* all have unique borders that are great at framing and foreshadowing parts of the story. This is something I have always wanted to incorporate into my work. I want the reader to be able to guess what might happen next and for it to add to the tension of the story. I also wanted the story to feel connected to the land and place it's set in, with beautiful rolling hills, a dark ominous forest, and big fluffy clouds.

All these choices I made about the visuals was to create a whole new world as the backdrop of my story, while not distracting from the subject matter of it.

Writing the story

The hardest part of making my picture book dummy was writing it. I have less experience with writing than I do with illustrating. And condensing a metaphor about chronic illness and disability into a 48-page book was quite a challenge.

I also wanted the metaphor to not be too overt and to be implied in the illustrations and in the borders.

Two weeks into this semester I had to have my script done. I was stuck with it until I started reading other pictures and seeing how they were written. It seems like an obvious thing to do once I realized how much it helped with the writing process. In the beginning I was too focused on Lenora being scratched by the werewolf, but the most important part of the story is about her emotions in the aftermath.

I wanted most people to be able to tell it is a story about chronic illness and disability, but I didn't want to be too overt, so when writing the story I added these key elements to achieve my goal:

I had Lenora talk about how scary it was to lose control of her own body. This is something I have experienced many times with Diabetes. I had her transformation be painful unless she takes medication for it since many disabilities are physically painful as well as emotionally painful. I had her take a long time to fully notice and realize what was happening to her body. Because denial about what is happening to you is something very common with chronic illness. I have dealt with it a great deal with diabetes I also had her parents try a bunch of different medicines to try and fix her that didn't work. as a reference to all the different "cure all's" marketed at chronically ill people and to also reference how long it can take to find a medicine that works for you.

The final element I added to show the chronic illness metaphor was the medical supplies in the border of some of the pages. I thought it was important to add visual metaphors as well as literary ones.

When writing I struggled the most with the ending. I didn't want it to end on a purely happy note. I didn't want the story to be inspirational as many disabled stories are written to be. I wanted it to feel real.

With a chronic illness there isn't a happily ever after where your condition goes away, or it doesn't affect you negatively anymore. With chronic illness there are good days and bad days, and you learn to accept that it's

part of you now. disabled kids deserve to have stories that reflect their lived experience even if they aren't purely lighthearted.

I still wanted it to have hope and fun however, for that is what has helped me the most with my chronic illness. finding the humor and positives in a shitty situation. Like getting to leave early from class to give myself insulin in high school or scaring one of my friends in the middle of the night by drinking a juice box for my low blood sugar.

Book Break down/How I accomplished my ideas for the project

Next, I want to talk about the part of my book that is actually related to my degree, the illustrations.

The sketches were done digitally in procreate but the final illustrations were done with a mixture of analog and digital. I took the sketches, printed them out and then used a light box to trace over them.

Then I inked the line art with brushes and a dip pen. Finally, I scanned in the inks and colored the backgrounds digitally. Next, I want to take inspiration from picture book 1 and do a book breakdown of my own book. I spent so long thinking about every part of this book, so I want to take you all through my thought process for each page.

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Cover

For the cover I wanted the werewolf to be looming over Lenora and her sheep. But not in a sinister way but more to express the importance of it in the story.

Page 4-5

To start off the story I wanted to show a werewolf surrounded by sheep on the copyright page. Then on the title page grass gradually turns to fur with Lenora and small little sheep walking towards the fur and the rest of the story.

Page 6-7

For this page I wanted to show Lenora, her sheep, and her house as an establishing shot of the story. I had a different composition in mind for a few months that had all the requirements but then I realized one of the pieces I made over the summer fit a lot better. So changed the season to summer and made it a sunrise to symbolize the start of the story. I also wanted the border to feel very idyllic and happy, to contrast with the turmoil of the rest of the book.

Page 8-9

For this spread I wanted to show her sheep's personality so there were stakes later in the story when they are avoiding her. In the border I have the sheep jumping over the fence as a lead into one jumping through the

window on this page. I also added Lenora's mom to this page to establish her early in the story so her parents appearing later wouldn't feel jarring.

I have a lot of simplified floral motifs in the borders throughout my book, so I wanted to introduce it early on this page. To me they feel like the kind of art that would be made in the world of my story.

Page 10-11

For this spread I wanted to introduce the forest as a place to be fearful of with all the animals running away from it. But I still wanted it to feel separated from Lenora and her family, so I had a tree dividing the forest from the house while also breaking the gutter. With the first introduction of the werewolf howling, I added little wolves to the border to hint to the werewolf early on.

Page 12-13

For page 12 I wanted Lenora and her sheep to feel small and isolated, so I had them hemmed in by the fence and the white of the page. Halfway through making this book I had a suggestion from my picture book crit group to have the werewolf be the only thing breaking the border which I thought was a fantastic idea. I already wanted the werewolf to feel like a complete disruption to Lenora's world so having the werewolf break the border provided a perfect metaphor for this. So, I incorporated that rule into the rest of my book. In this page I have it start with the howls breaking the border. On this page I wanted the forest to feel especially eerie foreboding to add to the tension and have all the sheep looking in the same direction for the wolf. Which is something I will call back to later.

Page 16- 17

For this spread I wanted the werewolf to feel more powerful than Lenora even though it was farther away, so I put it a lot farther up in the composition. I also have to break the border.

I also wanted the reader to feel engulfed by the forest, so I made the border an illustration of a tree behind the main illustration.

Page 18-19

I chose to add no text to this spread to heighten the drama and to give a moment of pause in the story. I also have the werewolf stepping from outside of the border towards Lenora.

When writing the story, I played around with having a thorn be stuck in the werewolf's paw as an explanation for why they are lashing out. I didn't want to demonize them since the story is about chronic illness not about defeating a monster. But I decided to have it be a subtler, secondary narrative in the illustration and border. Particularly with the thorns wrapping around the paws.

Page 20- 21

After Lenora is scratched on page 20, she starts to mirror the werewolf on the previous page. Now she is the one breaking the border and the conventions of the story.

On page 21 she is smaller on the page representing her anxiety over what just happened to her.

Page 22- 23

For this spread I wanted the wolf to become part of the landscape. It is now not a real thing in front of Lenora but an ephemeral entity representation of her anxiety and transformation.

Page 24- 25

On this spread Lenora is overwhelmed by the moon, it is a representation of change and transformation and her new connection to werewolves.

Page 26- 27

On page 26 and 27 Lenora and her new symptoms are taking up most of the page and what used to be the most important thing to her, the sheep are tiny in comparison.

Page 28- 29

On page 28 and 29 is when I introduce the medical motifs in the border to further imply the chronic illness metaphor in the narrative. To add further tension to page 29 and add a dramatic page turn to page 30. flip what I did on page 13 with the sheep all facing the forest but now they are all facing the house where Lenora is. She is what doesn't belong anymore.

Page 30-31

Pages 30 and 31 are some of my favorites in the whole book. Lenora is fully breaking out of her world, and it is deeply disturbing to her. The flower motifs that were cheery and inviting before feeling like somethings she can no longer fit into. They are scratched and broken as a with the loss of her control.

Page 32-33

For page 32 I wanted to show that at this point even when Lenora's curled up, she can't fit in the border. Her paw prints are in the border running into the forest.

Page 34-35

My concept for pages 34 and 35 was that she's running through a map of the forest with little spots of her in different places. Then on page 35 there's an "X" that marks the spot where she hides under a log.

Page 36- 37

Even though it's a tense scene of her parents looking for her late at night I wanted to add a bit of levity to this moment to break a bit of the tension. So, I added the sheep also looking for her on a map which also is a call back to the map on the previous page.

40-41

On page 40 and 41 I wanted to contrast the positives and negatives of being a werewolf with the negatives having bare branches on the borders and the positives having beautiful flowers.

44-45

For the final page I wanted it to feel peaceful and content. She is in the process of making peace with her new life and has reconnected with her sheep.

THE FUTURE

What is the future of this project?

I would love to have this published and will be working hard to achieve it. Some publishers I am considering reaching out to are Candlewick Press, Scholastic Press, HarperCollins, and Penguin Random House.

To further promote my thesis, I will be making a page on my website for the project and posting parts of it on my social media account. I will also send out postcards of my work to promote it.

I will also be joining SCWI, the Society for Children's Books Writers and Illustrators. To get professional advice, to promote my work and build community with other local children's book illustrators. I am also thinking about getting a literary agent since it is necessary if I want to illustrate and write my own books.

I've put a lot of work into this project and want to give it every chance I can to be published. I think it could do a lot of good. Disability isn't something often represented in fantasy settings. And I think it could make a lot of chronically ill kids feel seen. But if no publishers go for it I'll use it as an example of how I can illustrate a picture book. Either way I feel incredibly proud of what I have made and am excited to see what I can make in the future.