

[1] Intro ↴

Hello, my name is Halle Westerlund. Over the last semester, I have created a 40-page picture book dummy targeted to children ages 8-11 , exploring my feelings of loss for old-growth trees and deforestation.

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Old-growth forests are a natural environment where some of its trees have reached a state of maturity. These forests are shaped over the course of hundreds or thousands of years of trees growing up and dying to leave room for the next generation. Not only are these ecosystems self-sustaining, but they also provide the natural habitat to many different plants and animals.

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According to the University of Michigan, since the 1600's 90% of all forests in the United States have, at some point, were cut down. Today, only about 7% of remaining forests are considered to be old-growth. My own family history is closely tied to this loss.

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Many of my grandfathers were loggers and directly participated in the removal of old-growth trees in Washington State.

When I was younger, I learned about the true gravity of what the loss of Old-forests meant, I felt immense guilt and frustration having my legacy so closely tied to this loss. These feelings are what sparked my initial drive to make this book a reality.

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New Roots is intended to help children process environmental grief. Along with showing them that there is hope for preservation and regrowth.

Read Picture Book

how she relates to me

[25] *** ↴

Ella is my attempt to help people see the world through a different lens. When Ella is stripped from the tree, it is like she is being reborn, into a world that is strange and foreign.

[26] *** ↴

But still Ella remembers things long forgotten. She remembers what the world was like in its natural state, and before people took over the world and changed it forever. The world moved on without Ella; however she is still left with the now painful memories of how things used to be.

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Unlike Ella, all of us here today have only ever known a world where cities and infrastructure dominate all. We dam up rivers to make reservoirs for our cities' drinking water, excavate large swaths of land for iron and coal, and cut down entire forests to expand our cities.

For most of us It is incredibly hard to see any other way of living our lives. This is why the perspective of Ella is important. On pages 20 and 21 Ella has her first encounter with a town, and is struck by how much the land has been altered.

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This moment was important to touch on for me. I grew up in the Snoqualmie Valley in Washington State. The valley exists on the outskirts of the greater Seattle metropolitan area and in the foothills of the Cascade Mountain Range. Since I grew up on this edge of sorts, between this hub of industry, and the wildness of the wetlands and mountains, it was easy for me to see in just my short lifetime the nuanced changes that people have had on the environment. Every year, the population of the valley increased, becoming a bedroom community for Seattle. As a result, more land was cleared to make way for new housing developments, which chipped away at the edge of the forest.

[29] ***↓

The same has happened here in Portland, however, it was over a hundred years ago which makes it hard to imagine what it used to be like. But there were forests here.

[30] ***↓

It can be easy for anyone learning about old-growth forests to become overwhelmed with feelings of sadness and grief of what has been lost and what is at risk of being lost. And as a result become apathetic. This can be especially difficult for young children only just beginning to learn about our world's complex and difficult realities.

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My picture is intended to be an accessible introduction to environmental awareness and activism. Along with being a tool to help children and perhaps adults as well come to terms with complex feelings of environmental grief, while remaining optimistic and giving hope for the future.

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It has been a difficult journey to try to imagine how the world could be different, it was only when I got older that I learned about what old-growth forests are and what a terrible tragedy their loss was.

It hurts me to think about all of the things that have been lost and continue to be damaged and destroyed.

[33] ***↓

Choices about Ella

My original concept for new roots was about a nymph who goes on an adventure to look for her cut-down tree. But as I further explored the story, the character Ella slowly grew in my mind and she could not just care about one tree.

I made Ella to be the face of the forest and a personified representation of the trees that are almost always seen as an inanimate object and ultimately a resource.

In mythology, nymphs are typically depicted as unaging young maidens. However, if you know me, you know I love drawing older people. Ella is no exception. I felt if she were older, she would have a more interesting design and to me, more fun to draw.

I also feel that her older appearance serves to ground Ella as a more mature and nourishing, a look that reflects the noble beauty of old-growth forests.

[34] ***↓

Ella's root like hair is her most defining feature and sets her apart,

In the book, *The Secret Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben I learned that trees of the same species are able to connect their roots and exchange nutrients. This is the reason Ella is able to connect with the fir tree and how she is able to survive and communicate with the forest during her long slumber.

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I had a lot of fun meticulously rendering each of the roots in the final illustrations. I found the push and pull of the values and detail especially interesting.

*** [36] *** ↴

Art

(talk about changes. Feedback,)

In my art, I take great inspiration from the art of old children's literature. Specifically from illustrators who used watercolor and ink washes in their work, like Cicely Mary Barker, Trina Scharpt Hymen, and Beatrix Potter.

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I believe this is why my art has such a strong nostalgic feel to it. And While my art **does** embody a "classic" illustrative style, I enjoy bringing it into the modern world with contemporary topics and themes.

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The first thing I did once the story was completed was to thumbnail and plan out every spread of the art. To do this I used a template from when I took the picture-book class here at PNCA.

At this point, I was able to get a feel for which pieces I wanted to bring to a finish stage.

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Spread 3 for the importance of Ella joining the tree, along with the interesting effect of the radiating rings of the piece,

Spread 6, because it had a lot of intense emotions and depicted Ella's darkest moment.

And spread 16, because I wanted to show the brightness of the green forest that Ella is bringing into the world.

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Finally, It was time to dig in on the finished art.

I waited for a relatively long time to begin my final pieces because I wanted the extra feedback and to ensure that the art was developed as much as possible.

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It is at this point that I start collecting reference pictures for my drawings.

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Using these, I further refined the lineart and then printed all of my pieces and traced them onto watercolor paper. I produce my best work in analog mediums. It feels the most intuitive for me and I love the push and pull of physical paint. I have built my style around the use of it.

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With the line art transferred to the watercolor paper, I could **finally**, start the part I was waiting for all along. The paintings! For the sake of time, my mentor Colette recommended that I work on all the paintings at once, and I agreed. So I worked on 3 of the spreads and the cover at the same time. I did it on rotation, I mixed a few jars of the main colors in the book, brown, purple, blue, green, and burgundy and used them to differing levels on every spread of my book.

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As I waited for one layer of paint to dry I would move onto the next spread, repeating the process until I felt I built up enough value that I could move onto the next art medium.

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Alcohol markers. Alcohol markers are ideal for adding more precise and intense colors to any image, and since they do not reactivate water-based mediums they are ideal for working with watercolor paints. I primarily used the markers to add more subtle detail and lighting effects to my art.

The last step I did on the original pieces was to ink all the painting with brown India ink.

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I finally brought all the pieces back into the digital realm. Scanning them to finish the last details on Procreate. Most of these changes are smoothing some of the texture on the face and adding a little more depth and finalizing the values.

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Writing

The creation of my book manuscript is a strange one. Originally, I planned to have the manuscript of *New Roots* completely done by the beginning of the semester. I spent a long time working on it. I knew the overarching themes and the character arc Ella would go on, I had a hard time bringing Ella from point A to point B.

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It wasn't until the first week of the spring semester when I finally buckled down and finished the first draft of the *New Roots* manuscript. My friend Jay and I went to the SCBWI conference in New York. One of the workshops we were going to attend was to bring a manuscript of our own to work on. During the plane ride over to New York, we worked on our scripts. Jay on a fresh story and me using this new "deadline" as a reason to make the manuscript finally exist in full.

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So we wrote the start of the scripts on the plane and finished them in our hotel room the night before the workshop. It was a lot and as we were running around Times Square looking for

somewhere to print the scripts i realized the brutal truth, that I need strict deadlines and accountability for my writing.

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Despite the pressure of the moment, it was important for the creation of the first draft, forcing me to sit down and figure out the narrative beats of the story. Every subsequent draft was easier than the last.

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Agents/future

In the future, I would like to be an author-illustrator. However, to be able to do that, I have a long way to go in improving my consistent writing skills.

I would like to have an agent, One can help represent me as an artist but to also be there to help me with writing specific deadlines.

I will be adding new roots to both my portfolio and website, along with submitting it to publishers like – – HarperCollins and Penguin, Random House

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At the end of the day, New Roots has been an excellent learning experience. It has been an opportunity to hone my skills in both writing and illustrating picture books. While I am eager to take a long-needed rest, I am excited to continue creating more dummies that tell intentional stories about the world and what it could be.

*Even though the future of the remaining 7% of old-growth forests is uncertain,
It is important for future generations to be aware of their presence.
By writing about old-growth forests, I can help ensure that their story does not go untold.*

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Thank you!