



Would you like to introduce yourself?

Hi, my name is Polya. I'm an illustrator, collage artist, and book designer living in London. I've been working in children's book publishing for more than 10 years now, and I can say for sure — it's the most incredible journey I've ever had. I love every part of working with books: creating illustrations, helping other illustrators develop their projects, designing layouts and covers for new titles, and collaborating with inspiring people to bring new ideas to life. Every aspect of my work is exciting and meaningful, and I feel very lucky to be part of the children's book world.

How would you describe your style in three words?

Experiment, Surprise and Fun

What subject areas do you specialise in with your illustrations?

I really enjoy working on non-fiction projects, as they are always a bit of a challenge: finding the right way to present and explain complex topics visually in a clear and engaging way for children. I like to explore different perspectives for each subject and create varied, rhythmic layouts and compositions that keep surprising readers on every spread. Some subjects can seem boring or difficult to understand — even for adults, let alone children — so I try to use visual metaphors that make complex content easier to grasp, or even turn it into a playful visual joke. I always end up learning something new myself while working on non-fiction books.

At the same time, I'm also a big fan of board books and picture books. For younger readers, I love creating playful and joyful stories that help children learn new skills through laughter and fun. One of my recent author projects, *What a Mess*, is a counting book where all the animals got mixed up and among the usual pigs, birds, and tigers, each spread is filled with wild, funny, and unexpected creatures.

How did you develop your personal style? Have you always worked with collages?

When I first started, I worked a lot with gouache, which I still love to use for textures in my collages. During my illustration studies, I created my first children's book using collage, and it opened up a whole new world of visual storytelling for me. But at the beginning of my career, my first books for publishers were again painted in gouache. Later, while working on a non-fiction book about pirates (*Pirates, The Whole Truth*), I was searching for the right visual language. Pirates are surrounded by myths, and the colourful, adventurous image we picture has little to do with reality. I wanted to find a way to combine these two perspectives visually. That's when I rediscovered collage and since then, I haven't stopped exploring it. What I love most about collage is that the result is always partly unexpected, often leading



to new ideas during the process. The directions in which you can take and develop this technique are truly endless.

Which fact from the book surprised you the most?

I'd say it was the fact about night terrors. When my son was around three years old, he went through a period of waking up at night, crying and screaming, and it was very hard to calm him down. At the time, I didn't understand what was happening. Only now, almost 10 years later while working on this book, I realised that he was experiencing night terrors.

What did you enjoy most about working on the book?

I always really enjoy working with visual references. In non-fiction books, it's usually an essential part of the process. You can be as imaginative and creative as you like, but the images still need to be accurate. I spend a lot of time searching for good references, and not only for specific details, but also for inspiration from real life. For example, the dog in the book was inspired by my friend's dog we were looking after a lot at that time. One of the characters is based on my son's friend, and some of the buildings on the cover are simply the view from my window.

What was the biggest challenge in your work on the book?

Finding places to hide sheep on each spread! While working on the book, I kept thinking about how to include sheep, since we all know the classic trick of counting sheep when you can't fall asleep. Then my son came up with the idea to hide a sheep on the first spread, where lots of animals are sleeping. We developed this further into a playful challenge — hiding sheep on every spread so that readers have to keep counting them throughout the whole book. But the main challenge is that I probably hid them so well that I'm still not sure if I've counted them all correctly myself!

The book talks about four types of sleepers. What type of sleeper are you? Bear, wolf, lion, or dolphin?

I think I'm mostly a wolf, but as I get older, I notice more signs of being a dolphin as well.