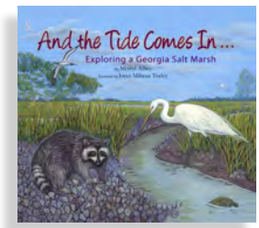


Thoughts on Illustrating:

'And the Tide Comes In... Exploring a Coastal Salt Marsh

written by Merryl Alber
illustrated by Joyce Mihran Turley

Illustrating images of nature and science has been my specialty for many years. When Merryl's project was presented to me, I immediately saw the opportunity to create images that would transport the reader to a very special but perhaps unfamiliar ecosystem, while adding learning opportunities beyond the storytelling.

I was fortunate to be able to travel to Merryl's research site on Sapelo Island in Georgia, taking hundreds of reference photos as we toured the locations in her story. Returning to my studio, I began identifying supporting images I wanted to include in the illustrations - flora and fauna commonly seen in the salt marsh. Having Merryl as a science consulatant as well as author made the process of sketching and revising very efficient!

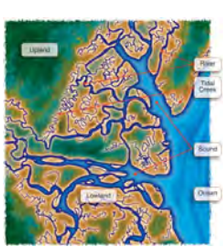
Initial rough sketches were presented and, following feedback from the author and editor, developed into detailed sketches. Finally, the illustrations were rendered with acrylic paints on frosted drafting film. The paintings were scanned, digital images were gathered, and the book designer went to work.

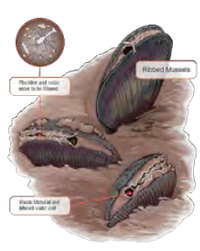
The book layout is deliberately designed with a full-page illustration on one page, and opposite, a page with text and a related sidebar and illustrated diagram. As a teacher once pointed out, having the narrative text on a single page makes it easier to share when reading aloud to a class. An occasional two-page spread allows the reader's eyes to linger and rest. Because the content of the narrative non-fiction book targets middle-grade readers, this format also helps avoid being labeled as a picture book, which may not appeal to this more mature age group.

When we reach the edge of the woods, I pause, but Ginger walks right out into the grass. "Wait!" I say. Too late. Ginger has already started to slide and before I know it she slips down into the mud, right at the edge of the creek. "That's why I wear old clothes" I say. "Marshes are muddy." "Now you tell me" Ginger laughs. She's having a little trouble getting up, so I get a piece of driftwood and use it to help pull her up. When she's upright again she plants the driftwood into the grass and says, "This will mark the spot where I first found out about marsh mud."

Have you ever gotten muddy outside?
What did you do to get clean?

As a trained engineer, I offer a unique perspective when creating artwork, combining careful study and analysis with a painterly style and colorful palette. Illustrated diagrams are a favorite way to share technical information. Often featuring a hand-rendered image in the background, adding labels, arrows, and other digitally-created elements enhance and direct the reader to engage.





Peace is Rooted in our Nature ™

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