

Indigo's Place

The Journey of Following an Idea

Thesis by Hayley Tanasijevich
IP 2015

“Indigo’s Place”: the Journey of Following an Idea

Thesis by Hayley Tanasijevich

I could say this book, “Indigo’s Place,” has always been within my head, waiting to be told since I was a child. From drawing and writing stories about animals and adventures, exploring the woods and rivers by my home, and reading fantastical and exciting books, I have been inspired by this idea of a “place” within my imagination since I was a kid. But I believe this book really began one fateful night in December when I used a new blue pencil for the first time. I laid in bed, upset that my story ideas were not clicking. I couldn’t get it right and the pressure of creating a perfect story kept eating at my mind. But that night, I took out that blue pencil, started the first page of a new small square sketchbook, and began drawing freely. The image of the overgrown flowers came to me, and the blue pencil allowed me to draw with whimsy and less worry. That pivotal illustration helped spark a new process and stimulated my imagination for the rest of the drawings to come. While there were different breakthroughs and struggles to develop and finish the story from start to end, the journey of creating the book mirrored the journey of Indigo reaching her place. I illustrated and wrote “Indigo’s Place” to create a children’s picture book influenced by my imagination as a child and my travels to Southeast Asia and New England as an adult, in order to inspire adventure and creativity with children and to fulfill my own childhood fantasy.

“Indigo’s Place” is the first full length book that I have both written and illustrated. The character Indigo wears a hat, jacket, and necklace, and baggy shorts, all inspired by childhood photographs and my favorite possessions. I drew the illustrations by hand with an under layer of a blue pencil with graphite pencil above it. I scanned and colored the spreads digitally. While I created many beautiful full spread illustrations, I was also inspired by my background in comics. I used panels on some pages to tell the narrative through a series of drawings opposed to text. I wanted the words to tell something different from the image or help aid the reader, but to me, the images should be able to tell the story on their own. Photographs from my childhood and my travels influenced my compositions. The size is 10”x10,” and the length is 34 pages long. It is a visually heavy story with

simple text to help guide the reader through Indigo's journey.

Indigo lives on the edge of a great wood [fig 2]. Everyday she pictures a place far beyond her backyard, an ancient place waiting to be found [fig 3]. She constantly imagines it as she plays outside and draws in her sketchbook. Until one day, she packs her things, puts on her favorite hat, and decides to find it [fig 4]. The hat was inspired by my own that I wore on trips and hikes with my family and is a symbol that she is ready for an adventure. For these initial drawings, I was inspired by my memories and experiences growing up in Marietta, Georgia. When I was a kid, my house and surrounding homes did not have fences constricting our wooded backyard area. I used to run up the hill beyond my house where the trees seemed so dense as they towered above me. I would explore the creek by my home, lake at the nearby clubhouse, and the Chattahoochee River down the road. I wanted to show Indigo using the nature around her as a natural play-scape for discovery. She documents everything she sees and imagines in her sketchbook, just like I did in my journals on my hikes. I contrasted the simple title page [fig 1], with Indigo drawing indoors surrounded by her books, illustrations, and stuffed animals, all inspired by my own favorite childhood possessions, to the lush green environment outside. But the colors and depth only increases as the story continues.

Indigo wanders through the woods as they become more dense and towering [fig 5]. When she loses her way, she tries a new path [fig 6]. And the farther she roams, the more she discovers [fig 7]. I purposely begin to include more animals, from woodland to exotic. I was inspired by my experiences at NELP, or the New England Literature Program, in New Hampshire for six weeks from May to June 2014. One of my first classes at the English program was to identify, touch, and write about moss. Throughout my book, I draw moss on rocks to allude back to this fascination with moss and the woods in New England.

Indigo crosses a river to find an overgrown field of flowers [fig 8]. I was inspired by the many rivers and creeks I had to successfully cross during my hikes in New Hampshire, while also alluding to the playtimes on the rocks at the Chattahoochee river as a kid. My simple desire to draw overgrown sunflowers, my favorite flower, inspired the pivotal illustration. Not only does this spread create colorful shift halfway through the book, but it was also where I began the concept for the story. I unconsciously referenced several "Alice and Wonderland" tropes within my book, but the

importance of the magical tall plants was to show the wonder in Indigo's expression as her journey really begins to escalate.

Indigo pushes off on a lily pad along the water, and rides down the river as she passes by more and more wild animals [fig 9]. Rivers have been meaningful to me ever since I started rowing in seventh grade. The sport helped give me another connection to the Chattahoochee as I was able to be on the water every day, encountering nature from a new perspective. The lily pad as a boat references the many rowing shells I rowed in during practices and races. But most specifically, I was inspired by the summer before I left for college, where for several weeks, I woke up for 6am practice every morning, and would row for 90 minutes in a single sculling shell along the long river, with only my thoughts and surroundings to focus on as the fog would clear along the beautiful still water. While *my* river at home has cliffs, hills of colorful trees, and animals like swans, otters, and herons, I wanted to enhance this experience for Indigo. The elephants were drawn from photographs by my travels to northern Thailand and inspired by my experience of riding, cleaning, and swimming with them in a river where I, too, got sprayed by my new friends.

Indigo meanders along on her new "boat" as the rocks turn into tall mountains with intricate carvings. I created a shift in the environment not only with scale but the carvings referencing her ancient and mysterious "place." While she draws her surroundings, her hat is blown off by the wind [fig 10]. Little did she realize, that a squirrel had been following her since she left home. He jumps off a branch to catch her hat and return it to her with an adorable expression. Squirrels have always been one of my favorite animals, especially once I encountered the chubby and almost domesticated ones in Ann Arbor. I wanted to create an image for the child to find on each page and chose a squirrel to be a representation of her home that is always with her. But as I further developed the story, it came to my attention that I should have the squirrel "break the fourth wall" earlier so that she can have a friend help her along her journey.

As she puts her hat back on, her new friend and she are surprised to see they are entering a jagged dark cave. I still feel afraid of the dark, especially after living with no electricity in the shadowy woods at NELP this past summer. Once Indigo enters the cave, any fear is soon replaced with wonder as they discover that the cave is lit by glowing snails and other luminescent plants and

animals [fig 11]. I loved to draw snails as a kid and transformed this dark place into a lit exciting environment.

The squirrel then helps guide her out of the cave to a bridge that leads to a jungle area that is beginning to resemble her imagined place [fig 12]. The square panel image of her exiting the cave was created by combining an image from the summit of Mount Washington that I climbed at NELP and the lush mountains of Bali from my travels in high school. However, Indigo then encounters an unexpected obstacle as she trips over one of the large roots and falls into a hidden hole underground [fig 13]. This became my most complicated spread. I was inspired by my first cross-country practice in first grade; even though I fell on the trail in the woods, I had a smile on my face and ignored my bloody knees. I wanted to show Indigo as a brave character who may stumble but is not discouraged. I also wanted this scene to represent my IP project, with my many “stumbles” and “obstacles” that helped lead me to new perspectives and breakthroughs. She looks around feeling a little distraught until she finds that within the walls are relics of her place. And, hidden behind a patch of roots is an intricate and ancient book! She unearths this new artifact, a blank sketchbook for her to begin, and is rescued from the hole by an elephant the squirrel has retrieved.

Only then, as she rides the elephant, is she lead finally to her place: a sublime tree house space with a library, green houses, nests, ruins, and many animals [fig 14]. My two favorite books and movies as a kid were “The Swiss Family Robinson” and “Doctor Dolittle.” I always wanted to live in a tree house and talk to animals. I also grew up playing on the large Live Oak trees at my grandparents house in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina; the Spanish moss dangled from branches above while the lower branches reached out twisting towards the ground, creating natural play grounds for both me and my siblings. In high school, my travels to the temples Angkor Watt, Angkor Thom, and Ta Prohm in Siem Reap, Cambodia helped inspire the imagery of an ancient structure with nature overtaking carvings and ruins. As an artist, I finally realized that I had the power to create this place that I had imagined since I was a kid. With overwhelming excitement, Indigo explores the spaces, until she climbs to a nest to reflect on her journey and finish the last page in her red sketchbook [fig 15]. She then shares her story, reading to her animal friends [fig 16] and brings the story full circle. Finally, she climbs to the top of the tree, holding her newly discovered

ancient book and plans her next adventure by starting the first page [fig 17]. With an open ending, she looks into the horizon, allowing the reader to have their own idea of what is next for Indigo.

Developing this book became a very organic process. I started by drawing the middle part of the book, with each new illustration inspiring another as the blue pencil allowed me to draw freely. I then began to create a large collection of research with books, photos, articles, videos, and even music to help me create these detailed and highly imaginative drawings. However, when I was challenged with questions about my stories and characters, I found new perspectives of how to create my book. I found the most guidance through listening to many Ted Talks other Pod Casts. Talks about “fear” and “failure” taught me that not only my character should have the courage to pursue her adventure, but I should also have no fear while channeling my creative confidence within my own work. Elizabeth Gilbert’s Ted Talk about a “different way to think about creative genius” mentioned Ruth Stone’s idea of genius being another force that *comes to you* opposed to feeling the pressure of creating *as* a genius. I had only learned of Ruth Stone and her poetry while I was at NELP this past summer. The Ted Talk helped to end my creative block because it reminded me of my experiences in nature in New Hampshire, and that “eureka” moment that night with my blue pencil. Steven Johnson’s Ted Talk about “Where Good Ideas Come From” discussed how most important ideas take time to evolve as “they take time to incubate.” He talked about the increase in connectivity with other people and ideas can help you have a breakthrough. I have been thinking about that memory from when I was 3 or 4 years old, when I took all my books off my shelves in my room, and threw them onto my bunk bed, explaining out loud the reasons I needed each book for my “journey.” All my ideas and experiences from the past and present connect to help influence the book I made. This research helped guide me with my process as I began to worry less of the pressure of creating a “perfect” story and more of making something meaningful to me.

I want my book to not only challenge a child’s imagination but inspire them to create an idea and pursue it without fear. My character is venturing on her long journey, whether real or imagined, but she learns that she is not alone. One of my other NELP authors Thoreau stated, “The world is but a canvas to our imagination.” A child can explore wherever or create whatever they want with their imagination, and my goal is to break down the barrier of reality and inspire this with my book.

Outreach has really impacted my project. Working with Mr. B's Kindergarten class at Bach Elementary school has been a huge inspiration to me. Over the past semester I have connected to all the kids and look forward to working with them every week. Every week, I am not only drawing with the kids but I am happy to say that they are excited to see me, show me their drawings, and let me play with them at recess. I really enjoy connecting with the kids on this other level and it allows me further embrace my inner child. I had a turning point one afternoon in their class that helped guide my story to where it is today. When I told Evan, a creative and expressive five year old, that I was writing a story about kids who explore a tree house, he exclaimed, "You should make it a magical tree!" I realized my story should engage and inspire imagination not be explain how it "works." A child does not need to be told how to use their imagination. As a storyteller, it's my role to engage their creativity and sense of adventure.

Throughout the year, I looked to my bookshelf filled to the brim with picture books for inspiration. While many books inspired me through their styles and medium, stories like Aaron Becker's "Journey" and Rilla's "Her Idea" with independent and creative female characters influenced me the most. However, I think there is a gap in those stories and I am here to fill it. I want to combine the idea of having a journey *and* pursuing a creative idea. I looked to children's graphic novels and books without text to get inspiration of different ways of story telling with panels. Indigo is a representation my younger self with my unlimited imagination and desire to explore; yet, the challenge has been to create a character inspired by my life, whether from the past or the present, but not letting certain memories or experiences dictate the story. By collecting so many picture books, I have been able to see how a character and story can connect to an audience, whether a child or even an adult.

My mom always told me since I was a kid, "when in doubt draw a tree." It seems inevitable that all my experiences playing on the large live oak trees at my grandparents house in Hilton Head Island and among the woods by my house and along the Chatahoochee river in Marietta, Georgia would influence me to make the image of this "place." I think of the trees growing over ancient temples I saw in Cambodia and the immense forests I hiked through in New Hampshire. I have always been inspired by nature as an environment for play, and trees have always been an important

part of that. As Indigo's journey to her place represents her following her idea, the giant tree's branches represent different ways to think while still rooted to the ground. To me, it feels strange to look at my childhood from a distance. I see these artifacts of the past with old photographs and my own drawings. I have these vague memories, but it can be surreal to think that *these were are drawn by your own hand* and *that adorable small child was actually you*. This book was a way for me to connect to the unlimited imagination I had as an a child and to fulfill that little girl's dream of being an artist and author. When I showed my book to my kindergarteners for the first time, it was exciting to see their reactions. One boy in the class said "I would never travel that far from home." But then Mia, a bright girl who reminds me a lot of myself when I was her age, exclaimed, "Oh, I would!" It was really an exciting moment for me. To think I was their age once, just developing these skills and would help me grow into the artist I am today. Hopefully, I can impact more children, especially young girls, through this story and inspire any reader to "make every day an adventure."

Bibliography

Alexander, Rilla. *Her Idea*. Flying Eye, 2015. Print.

Alexander, Rilla. (November 2012) Rilla Alexander: Without the doing, Dreaming is Useless. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/53424300>

Becker, Aaron. *Journey*. Somerville: Candlewick Press, 2013. Print.

Dowling, S. (2007). The brightening glance: Imagination and childhood. *American Imago*, 64(4), 582-586. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/197194771?accountid=14667>

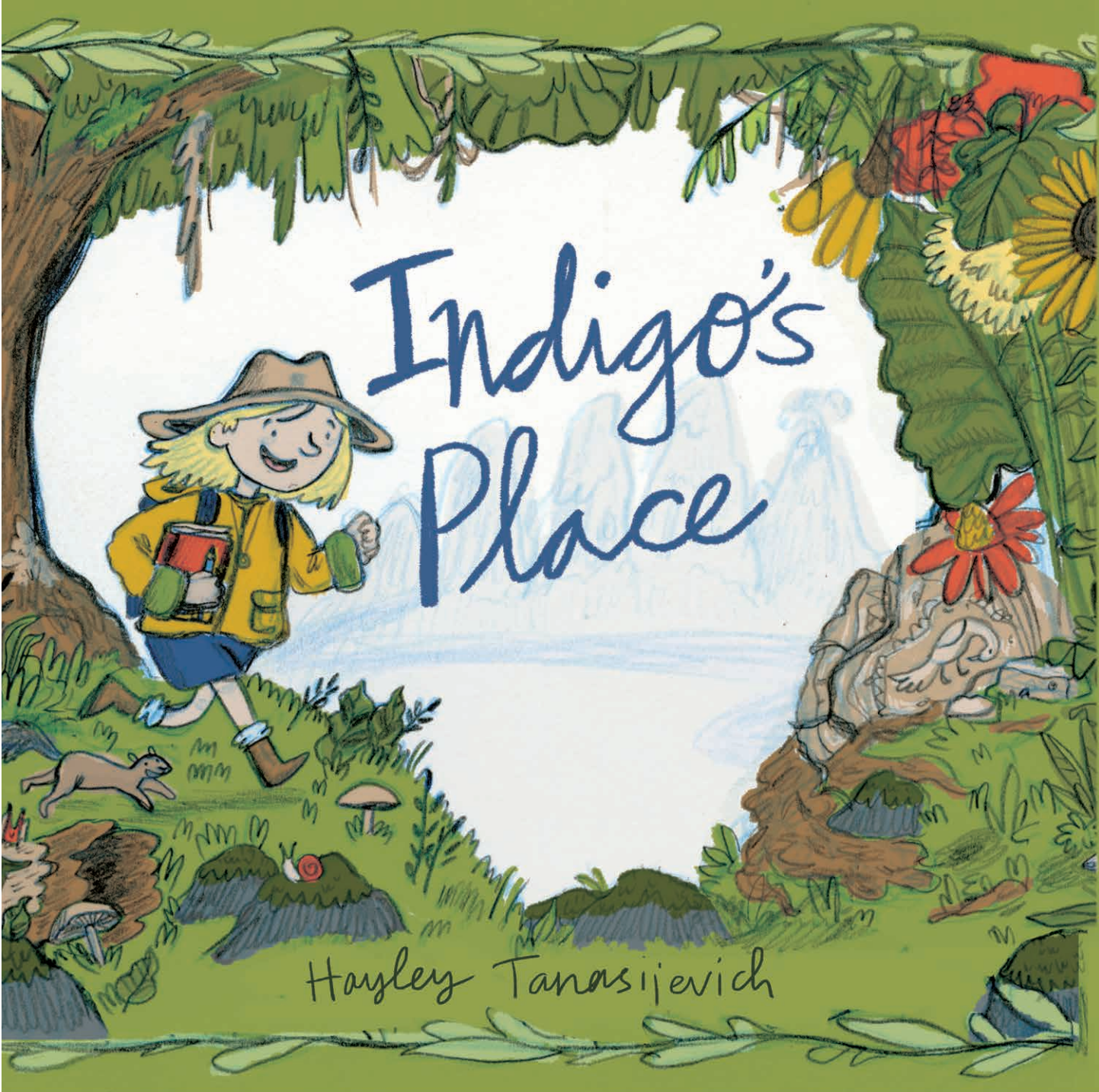
Gilbert, Elizabeth. (February 2009) Elizabeth Gilbert: Your Elusive Creative Genius. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius?language=en

Hughes, Emily. *Wild*. London: Flying Eye Books, 2013. Print.

Johnson, Steven. (July 2010)Steven Johnson: Where Good Ideas Come From. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_johnson_where_good_ideas_come_from

McConeghey, H. (1994). The ecology of imagination -- the ecology of imagination in childhood by edith cobb. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 95(5), 39. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/210987330?accountid=14667>

Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York: Harper Collins, 1963. Print.



Indigo's Place

Hayley Tanasijevich



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3

Until one day, she packed her things



fig. 4

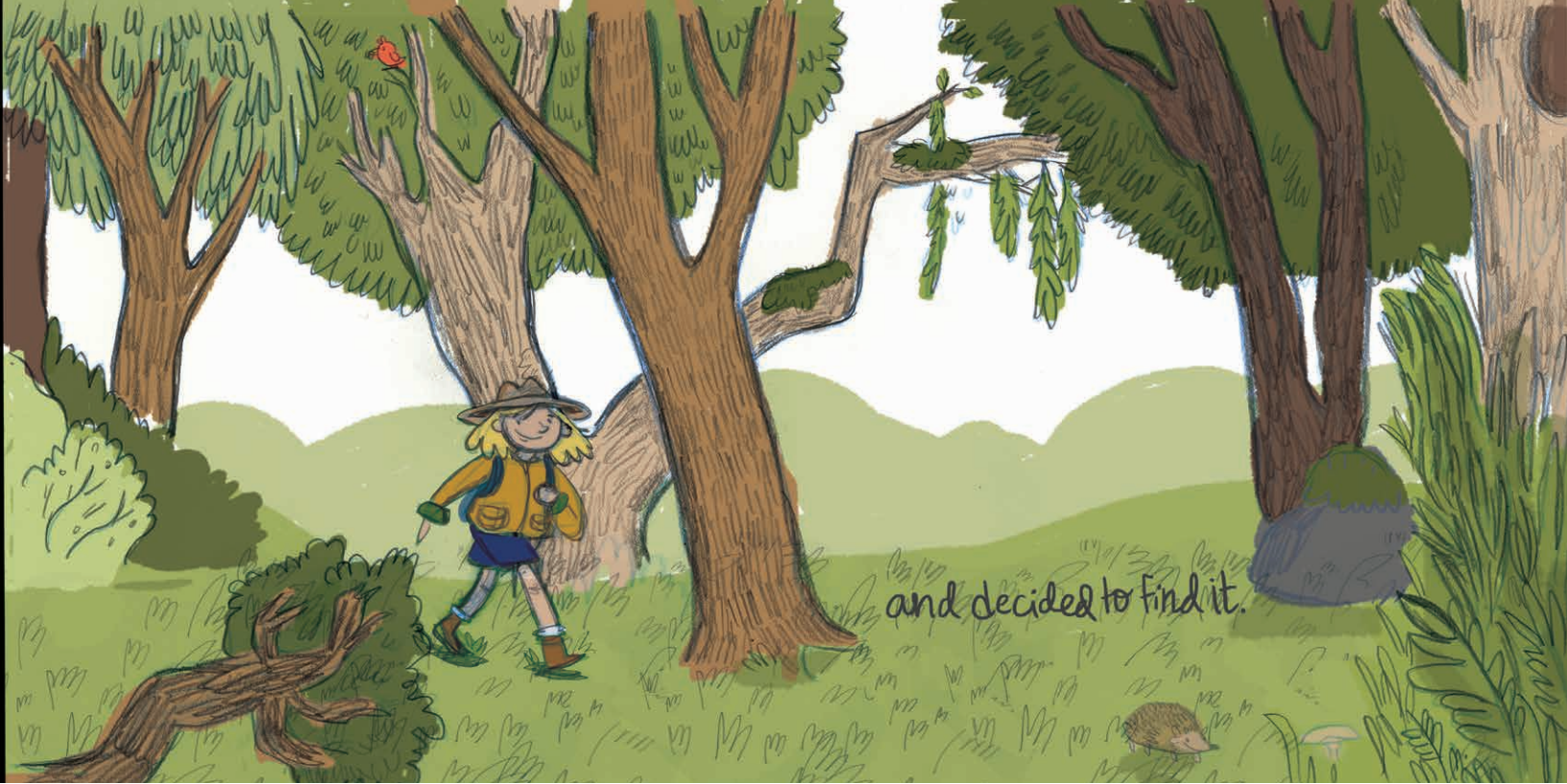


fig. 5



fig. 6

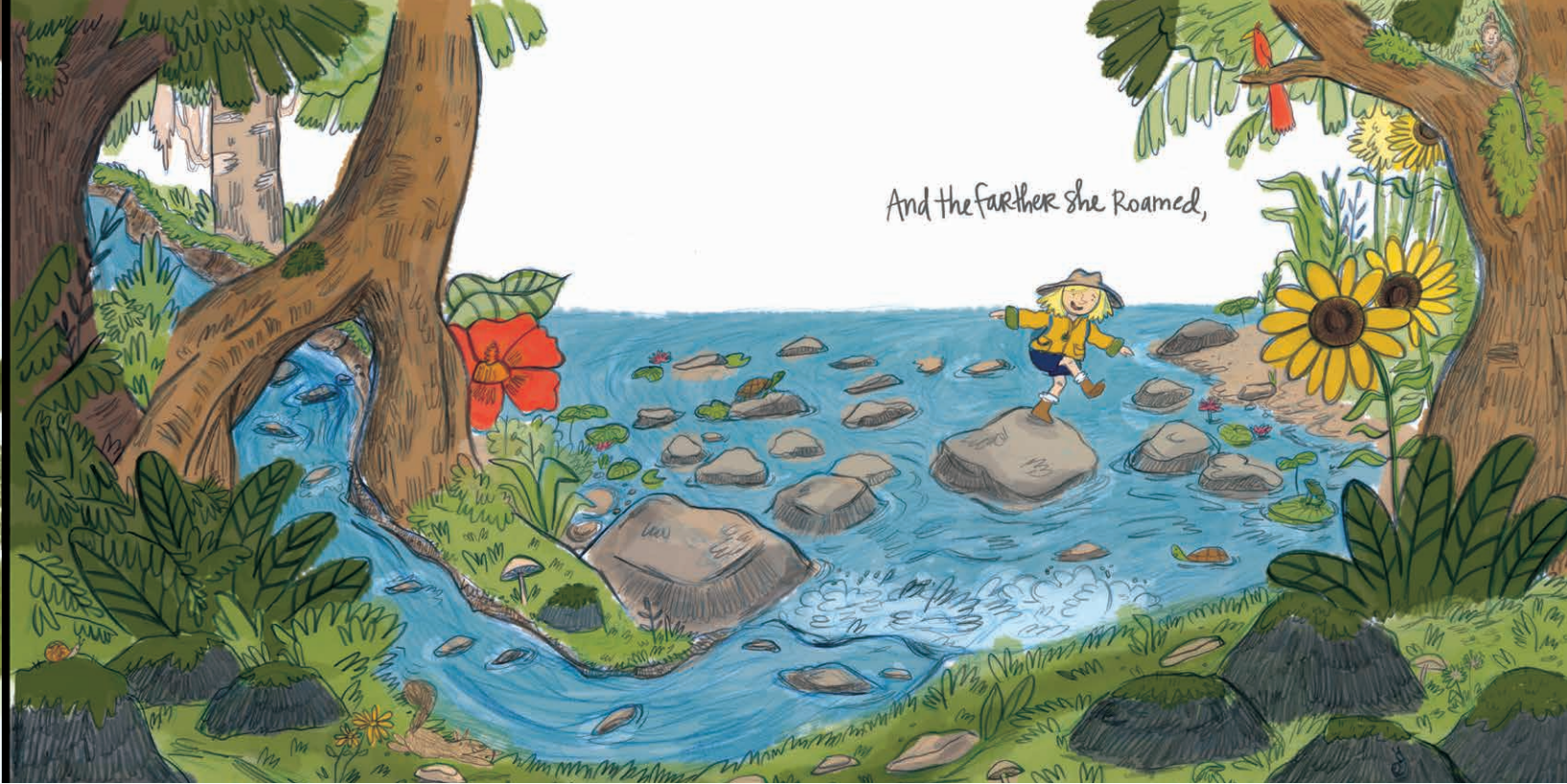


fig. 7



fig. 8



fig. 9



fig. 10

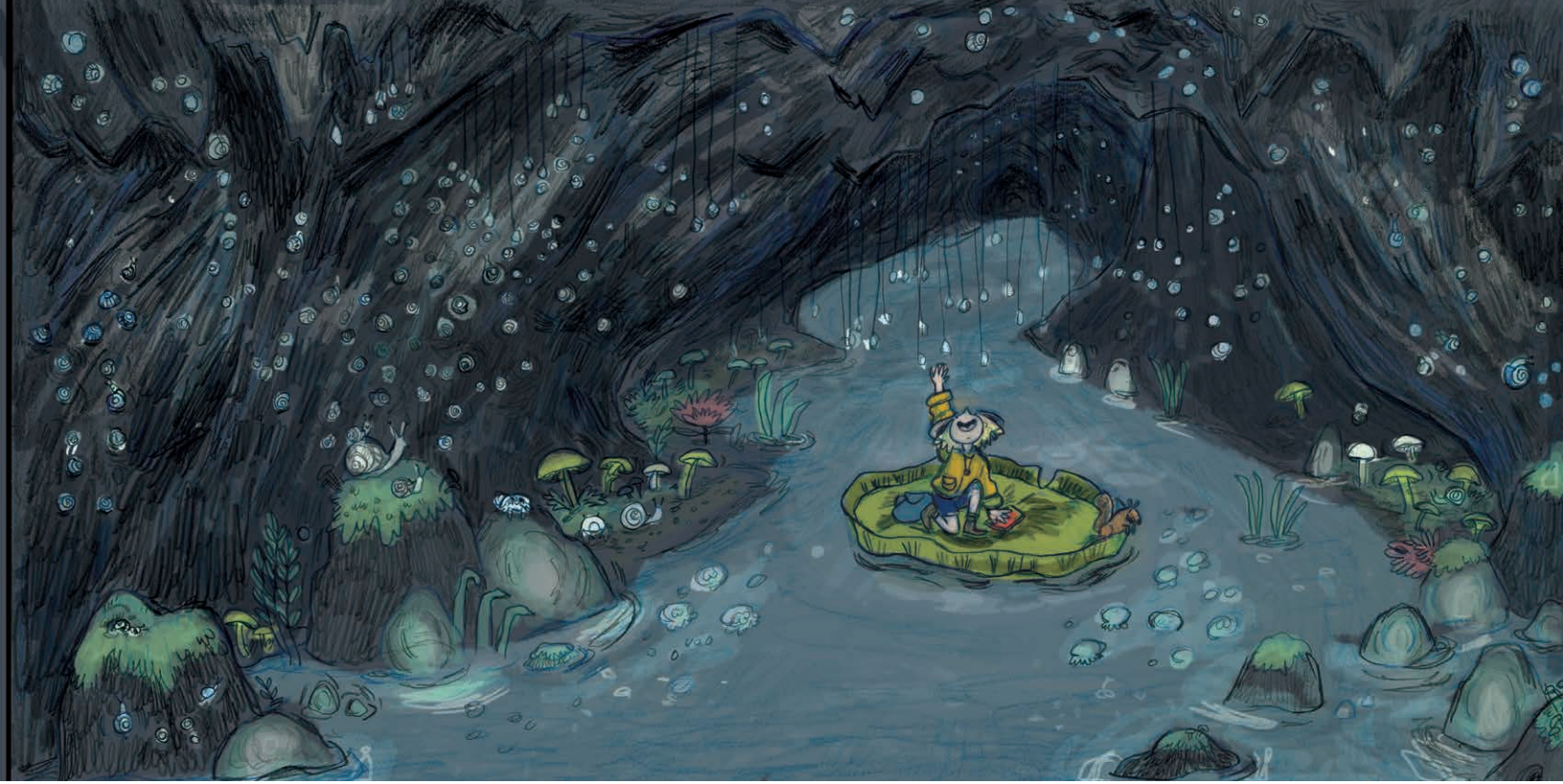


fig. 11



fig. 12



fig. 13



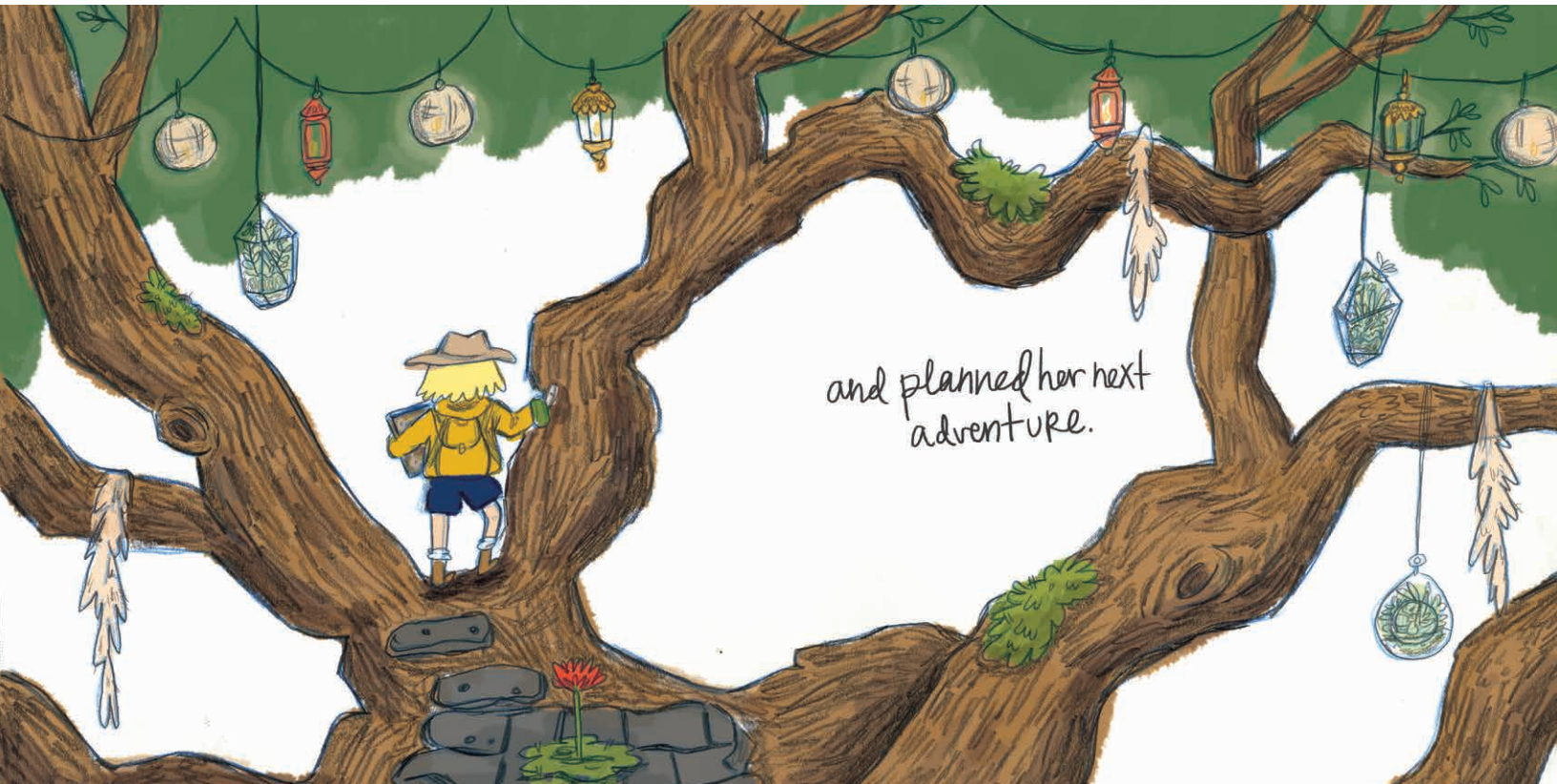
fig. 14



fig. 15



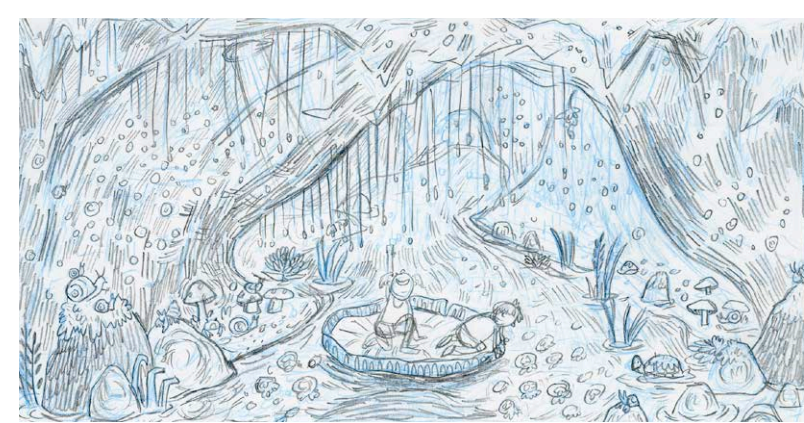
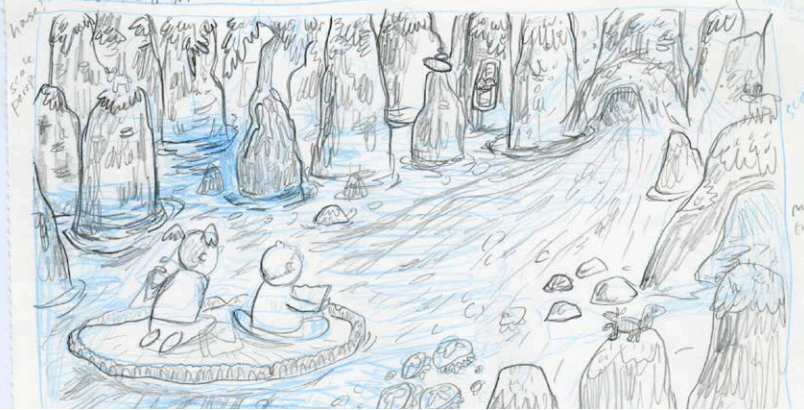
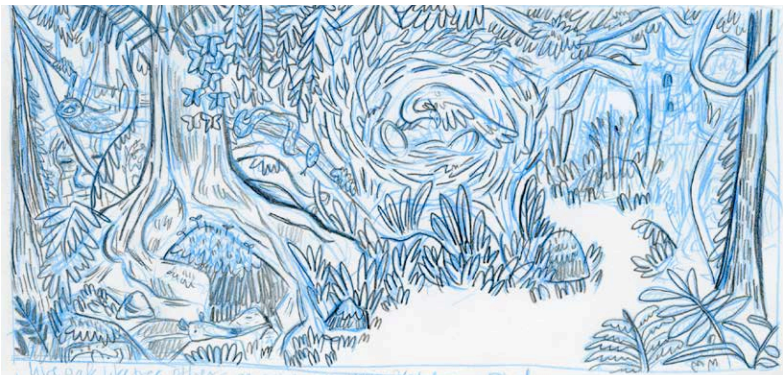
fig. 16

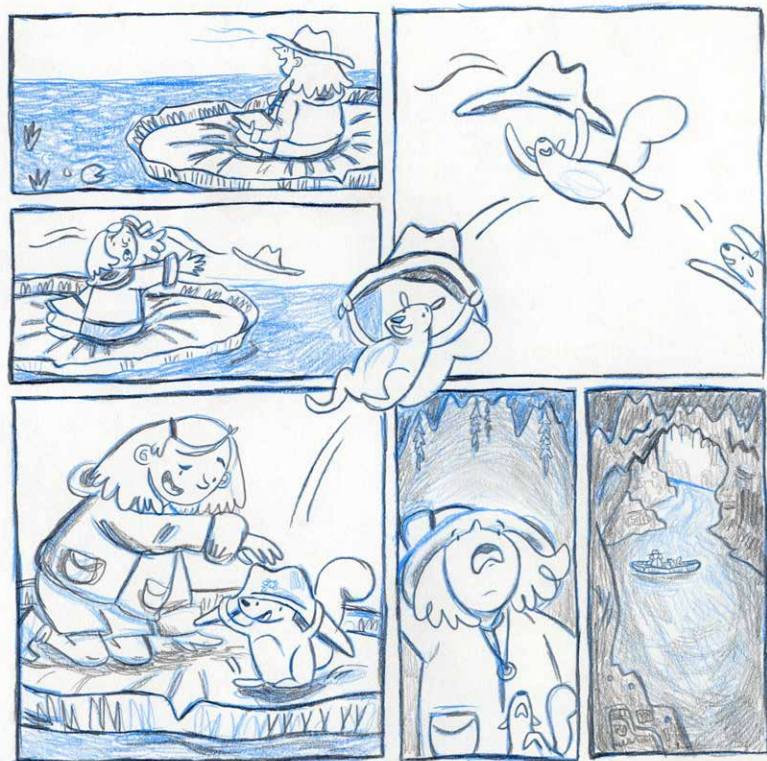
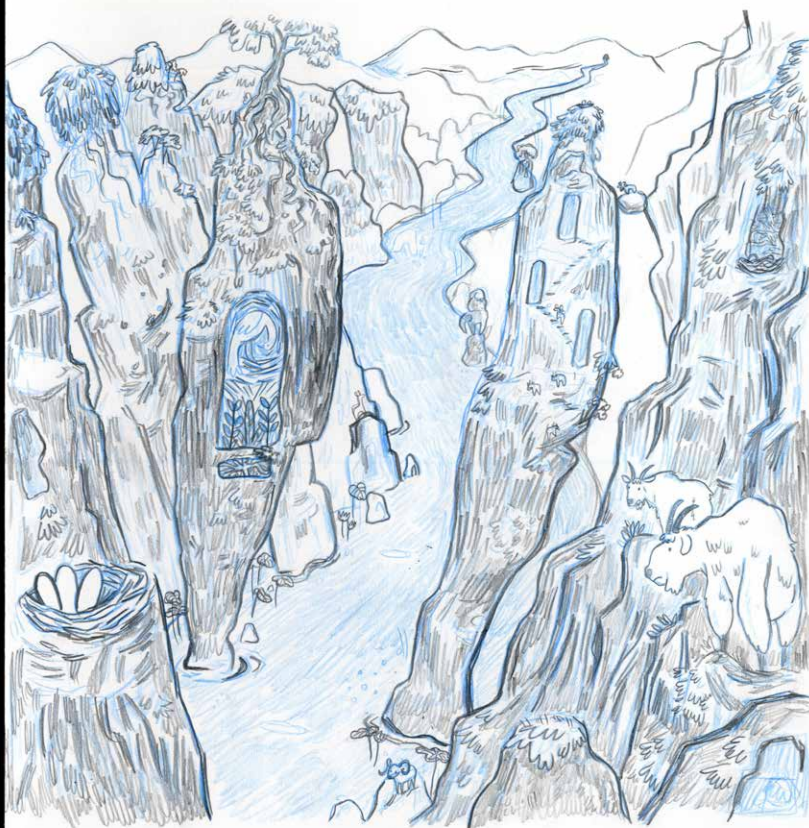


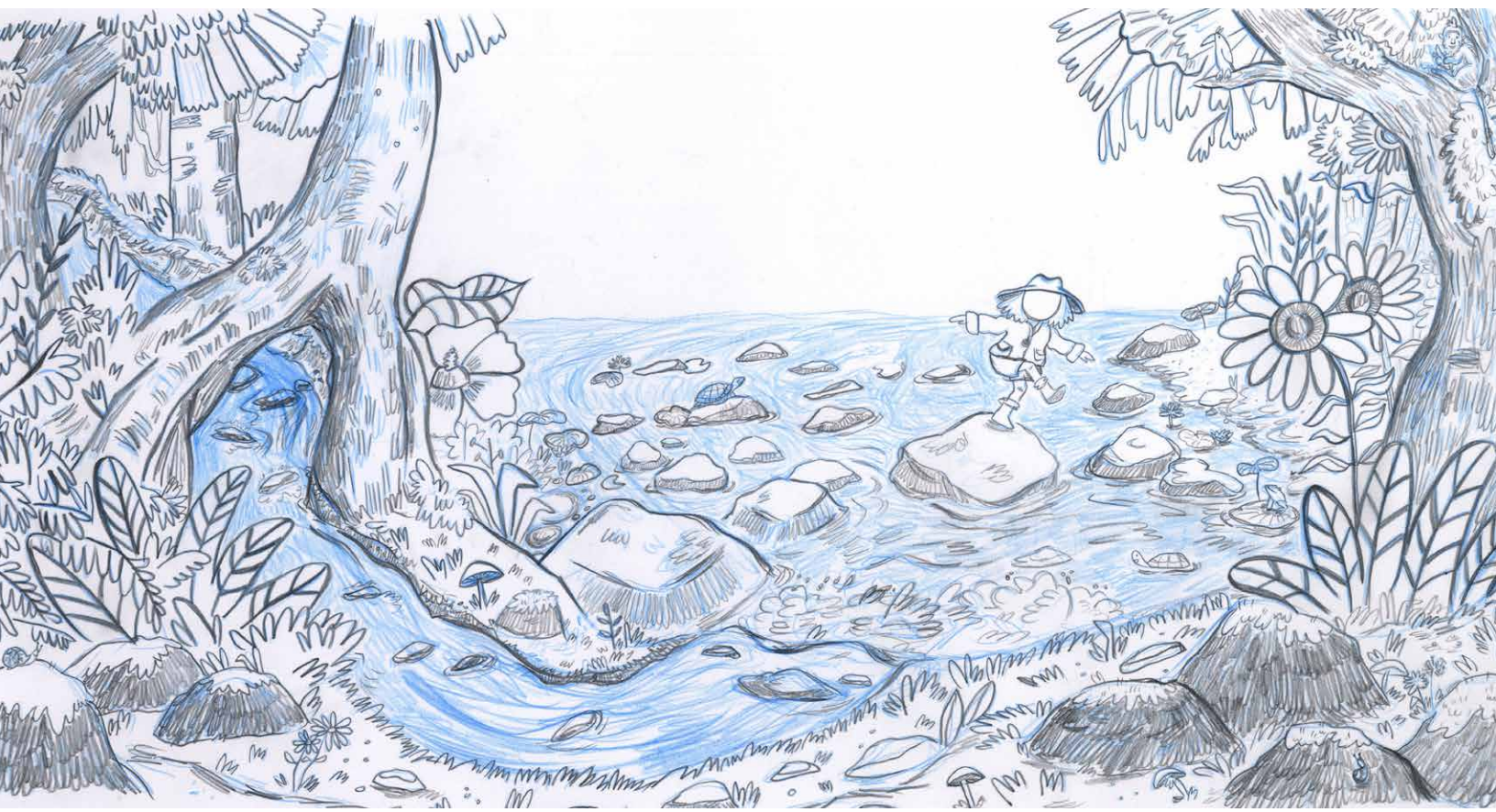
and planned her next
adventure.

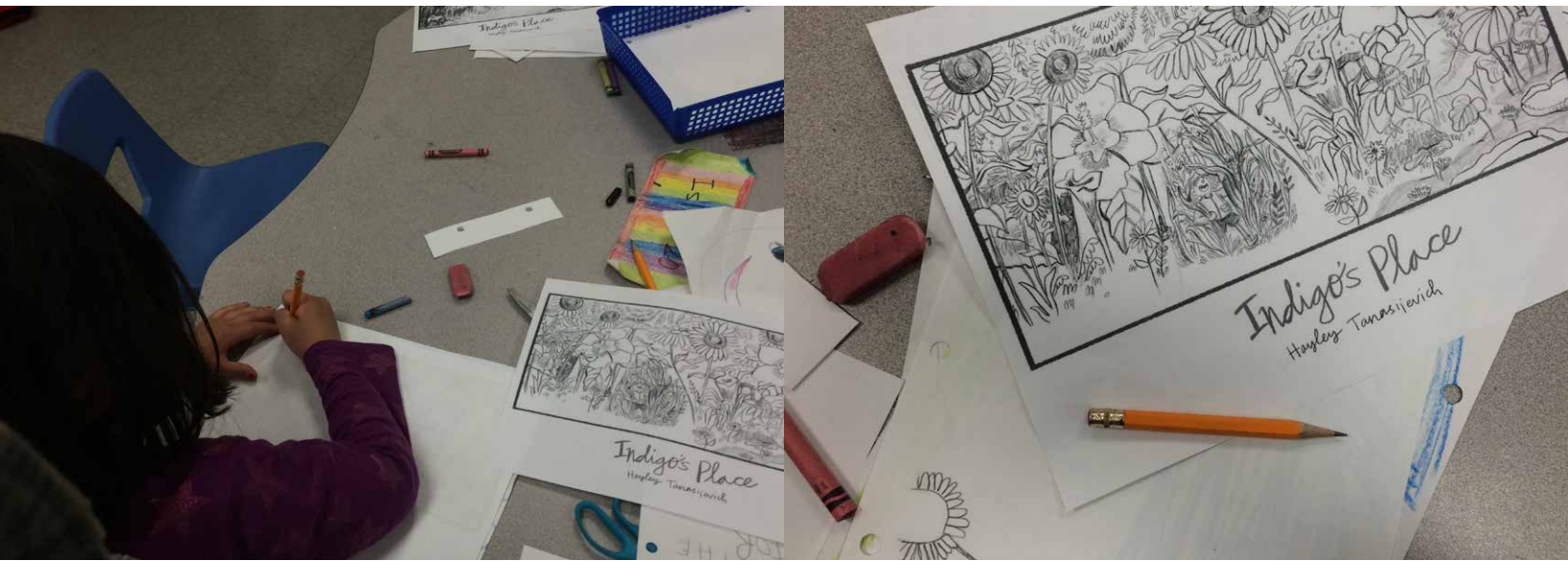
fig. 17

sketches with blue pencil





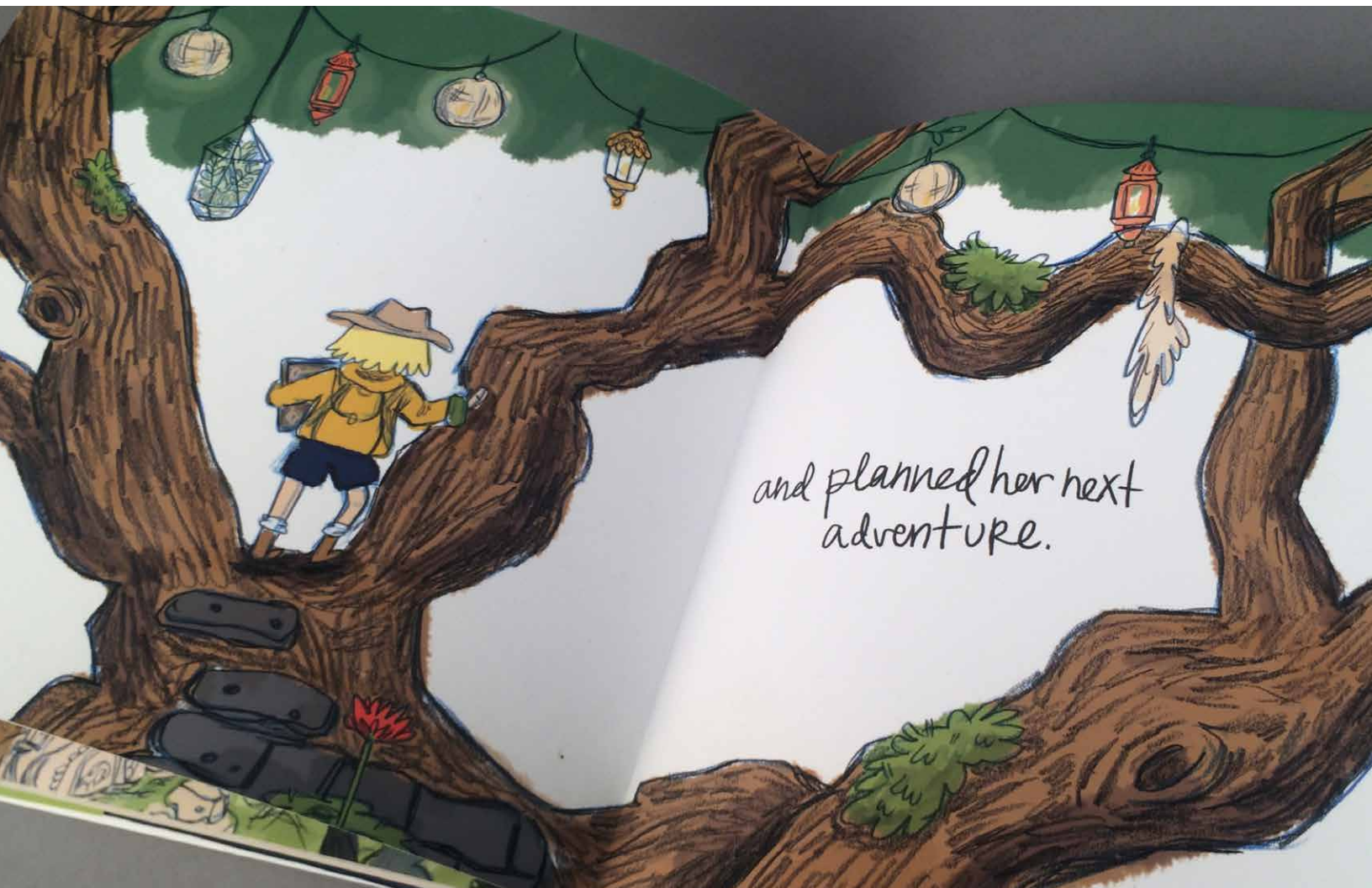




kindergarten class time







and planned her next
adventure.











Thank You!