



# Windows into Illustration: Lauren Child

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## Lauren Child on Clarice Bean, That's Me.

Lauren Child's funny, unruly picture books with their dramatically zany illustration have transformed expectations about the kind of artwork that young readers enjoy. Here she explains the techniques and thinking behind one of her best loved picture books, **Clarice Bean, That's Me**.<!--break-->

Whenever I start illustrating a new book, I always try to think how I can make it different from the last. I try to think of new ways of laying out the page, perhaps making the text more dominant, more a part of the illustration or by using different materials as part of the illustration. It's as much about keeping me excited about my work as keeping the reader interested.

I want the reader to be surprised as they turn the pages ? so I will generally put a fairly conventional interior scene next to quite an abstract more graphic page. Or perhaps a very detailed page using a lot of collage next to a page which is done using just gouache and pencil.

In this illustration from **Clarice Bean, That's Me**, Clarice is talking about a series of events which lead to her getting into some very ?big trouble?. Clarice's younger brother Minal is playing football on her bed, Clarice gets cross, chucks his duvet out of the window, it lands on next door's dog, so dad gets in a row with the neighbours. Minal starts smirking because Clarice is in trouble, so Clarice tips a bowl of spaghetti hoops on his head.

This was one of those difficult pages ? there were so many good things to illustrate, but if I had picked only one then the reader would lose the whole build up to Clarice finally losing her temper. If I had done little vignettes of each event the page would have lost its punch and not really have fitted in with the style of the book.

I didn't need to show Clarice's bedroom again as it appears at the beginning of the book and, we get to see the garden on the previous page, so instead I decided to have an aerial view of a huge bowl of spaghetti, placed right in the middle of the picture. The background is a plain blue because the orange of the spaghetti looks really zingy next to it. Each character involved in the scene, is then placed around the bowl, linked by a strand of spaghetti. The reader, can then animate the scene in their own head ? the text is telling you what occurred and the characters expressions are telling you how they are feeling about each other. The page has a bigger impact this way and I like the look of it as a design.

The following page is very stark. The words ?BIG TROUBLE? are written really big like one of those ?WARNING? ?KEEP OFF THE GRASS? or ?ABSOLUTELY NO TALKING? notices which always make me feel like I am in trouble even though I haven't been on the grass, or opened my mouth. Clarice is in monochrome because I think this is how I often felt when I was in trouble as a child ? as if all the colour had been drained out of me. The background I painted in a kind of vivid poisonous-looking green, reflecting Clarice's unrepentant state of mind. It's a very simple black and white sketch and was my first attempt ? usually I draw things over and over until they are right ? it takes me a lot longer than most people imagine but this was one of those pictures which just came out right, first go.

**Clarice Bean, That's Me** is published by Orchard Books (1 84121 583 X, £4.99 pbk). Lauren Child won the 2001 Kate Greenaway Medal with **I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato** (Orchard, 1 84121 602 X, £4.99 pbk).

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