



Windows into Illustration: Mairi Hedderwick

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Windows into Illustration

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Mairi Hedderwick explains the thinking behind her illustration.

The setting to Mairi Hedderwick's Katie Morag stories, the fictional Isle of Struay, is as central to the stories as Katie Morag McColl herself. Based on the Isle of Coll, Hedderwick's home for many years, the land and seascapes of Struay with their changing moods and light are both backdrop to and part of the stories. Here Mairi Hedderwick explains the thinking and techniques behind her illustration.

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As a '60s graduate in Mural Painting and Ceramics from Edinburgh College of Art, I never wonder at my transformation to illustrator. Drawing was such a strong discipline in those days. It was that skill which earned a living in between teaching and all the other jobs that flesh is heir to in bringing up a family. Katie Morag was born in '84. Prior to her birth I was a Macmillan's illustrator, never thinking to become a writer. 'Why not??' my editor nudged.

In publishing terms, Katie Morag is 23 years old. But it took three years before the first book was accepted; the little girl's cosily 'close' grandfather was not PC. I turned him into a grandmother wearing dungarees and driving a tractor. The feminists were thrilled.

All my life I have been able to visually recall landscapes and locational details of a part of the world I know and love, the images displayed like a culturally inherited picture gallery in my mind's eye. I've tried to illustrate other locations, subjects, but the results were false.

I try, 25 years on, to avoid nostalgic romanticism. The island updates ' a new pier has been built, there is a computer in the school. However, after all this time, it is a mighty drag keeping the fictional landscape, characters' features and domestic details consistent. A child once wrote to tell me that Katie Morag's bedroom window was in the wrong place. [image:Katie Morag - Shop LH.JPG:left][image:Katie Morag - Shop RH.JPG:right]

But within these self-imposed strictures I have fun portraying subversive details. The breastfeeding scene in **Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted** ('86) prompted some library cancellations. Since then Mrs McColl is feeding in the background, whenever possible. Only one example of visual anarchy that I delight in.

A Katie Morag book starts with pondering on a moral that will exercise, and be resolved by, Katie Morag.

I use A4 sheets (many) squared into 32pps for first pencil drafts of words and pics. The chosen draft is transferred to actual size pencil dummy.

Final art starts with light pencil for guidance before I make candle wax strokes and smudges for subsequent effects for sky, sea, texture and emphasis. Old friend Quink mixed with water to exciting unpredictability is next. Then I work with

my ancient Rowney water colour paint box and water crayons. Felt tips, 0.1 and 0.3 pens (sepia, black and blue) are for detail.

Finally Tippex for sparkle? and corrections.

Illustrations from **Katie Morag and the Dancing Class** (Bodley Head, 978 0 370 32910 9, £9.99 hbk) published this month and **Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted** (Red Fox, 978 0 09 911881 7, £5.99 pbk).



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