

Betsy Lewin

Biography

Author of 10 books and illustrator of over 60, Betsy (Reilly) Lewin, born May 12, 1937, has been drawing since she was a young girl, influenced by the work of Randolph Caldecott, Ernest Shepard and Beatrix Potter. During childhood, she took private art lessons and then attended the Pratt Institute of Art, studying illustration. Betsy met Ted Lewin at Pratt and they married in 1963. She began her drawing career at a New York-based greeting card company. This led her to freelance for other card companies and she eventually began writing and illustrating stories for children's magazines. Lewin's picture book career began when an editor at Dodd, Mead and Company asked her to expand the poem "Cat Count" that she had written and illustrated for *Humpty Dumpty*. When it was first published in 1981, *Cat Count* was black-and-white, but it was republished in 2003 with color. Lewin's most well-known work consists of black ink-lined, anthropomorphic animals, drawn with a felt-tip pen or brush and then given a watercolor wash. Most notably, Lewin received a Caldecott Honor in 2001 for *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*.



Using tracing paper to initially draw her characters, she is then able to revise expressions or gestures by simply tearing that section off and trying again. The final drawing may look like a "sewed-together Frankenstein monster" (TeachingBooks interview), but she then makes multiple copies on one-ply Strathmore Bristol paper for the watercolor wash. Lewin's illustrations, however, extend beyond the black-outlined, colorful, and cartoon-like. For books such as *Chubbo's Pool* and *Booby Hatch*, Lewin painted in a "controlled, realistic" style (NCCIL, n.d. p. 2). Although she still draws on tracing paper, she uses a hard 4H pencil instead of a brush or pen and copies the images onto a heavier paper to paint with watercolors.

An animal lover, most of Lewin's ideas involve animals and she prefers to draw animals. In a 2001 interview, Lewin claimed that she is not successful at creating realistic-looking people, saying "they haven't got that sparkle in their eye; they haven't got the personality that jumps off the page at you, where my animals do."

The Lewins live in Brooklyn and Betsy works in a studio at home. In their free time, the Lewins travel all over the world together, both gathering ideas and materials for upcoming projects. Because the Lewins have different styles of writing and illustrating, they usually do not collaborate on books. The exceptions are *Gorilla Walk* (their first collaboration), *Elephant Quest*, and *Top to Bottom Down Under*; Ted's watercolor paintings of the natural world are supplemented by Betsy's black-outlines sketches of particular objects.



What Others Say

Of *Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa*: "Lewin's bold-lined illustrations extend the comedy and the affectionate friendship with expressive animal characters . . ." (Gillian Engberg, *Booklist*)

Of *Cat Count*: "Lewin gets cat expressions and poses exactly right . . ." (Diane Foote, *Booklist*)

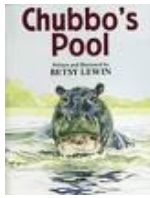
Of *Click, Clack, Moo*: "Lewin's watercolors are as big, bold and outrageous as the animals' demands." (Barbara Auerbach, *School Library Journal*)

Of *Booby Hatch*: "Readers can almost feel the softness of Pepe's feathers and the ocean's coolness through Lewin's watercolor illustrations." (*The Reading Teacher*)

A Sampling of Betsy Lewin's Work

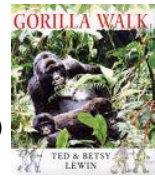
Written & Illustrated by Betsy Lewin

Booby Hatch (1995)
Cat Count (1981, 2003)
Chubbo's Pool (1996)
Walk a Green Path (1995)



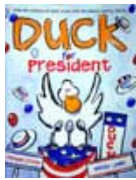
Collaborations with Ted Lewin

Elephant Quest (2000)
Gorilla Walk (1999)
Top to Bottom Down Under (2005)



Collaborations with Doreen Cronin

Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type (2000)
Dooby, Dooby, Moo (2006)
Duck for President (2004)
Giggle, Giggle, Quack (2002)



Collaborations with Erica Silverman

Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa (2005)
Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa: Partners (2006)
Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa: School Days (2007)
Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa: Rain or Shine (TBD)

Other Collaborative Works

Araminta's Paint Box (1990)-Karen Ackerman
Dumpy LaRue (2001)-Elizabeth Winthrop
Two Eggs, Please (2003)-Sarah Weeks

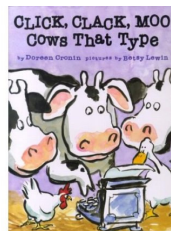
To find out more about Betsy Lewin:

- Betsy Lewin's personal website: www.betsylewin.com
- A TeachingBooks Original Author Program: Betsy Lewin
www.teachingbooks.net/spec_athr.cgi?name=Lewin%2C%20Betsy
- Cummings, Pat (editor). (1999). *Talking with Artists, Volume 3*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Meet the Artist: Betsy Lewin, National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature
www.nccil.org/blewin.html
- Reading Rockets--Betsy Lewin: www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/lewin

Teaching Suggestions

Many of Lewin's books could be explored through dramatic response. For example, students could act out *Chubbo's Pool*, in which a hippo learns it is better to share his pool. There are plenty of animal characters for students to portray, as well as action and emotion to encourage dramatic scenes.

Similarly, Mathis (2005) suggests using Karla Kuskin and Betsy Lewin's *So, What's It Like to Be a Cat?* in a choral performance. As two or more students read the text, other students can pantomime the rhyming cat's movements.



Illustrator study on Betsy Lewin

Replicating Lewin's tracing paper process can teach students about revision process (making mistakes is OK). The "Frankenstein monster" version can be copied for students to add color.

Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin's comic adventures featuring farm animals provide ample opportunity for reader response. The creation of a barn scene, perhaps for a puppet show, would be an engaging, hands-on activity. The animals could be made from milk cartons, white paper bags and/or construction paper. Students could create sequels, prequels or other sagas involving these favorite characters.