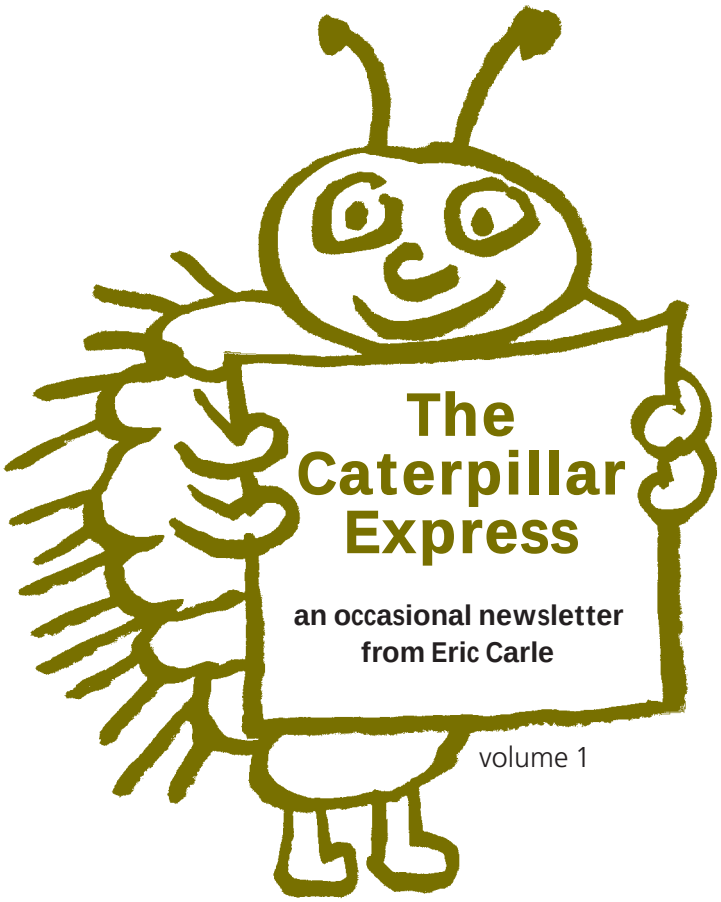


Dear Friend,

Thank you for writing; it's a joy to hear from you.

Many of you have grown up — or are growing up — with my books. It is hard to believe that I have been making books for over 25 years! Over the years I have received many letters from readers just like you.

Some of my favorite ones have come from people who ask interesting questions. These readers have given a lot of thought to my books, and I appreciate that.

Let me share with you some of the questions that people ask most:

Why do you use small creatures in your books most of the time? When I was a small boy, my father would take me on walks across meadows and through woods. He would lift a stone or peel back the bark of a tree and show me the living things that scurried about. He'd tell me about the life cycles of this or that small creature and then he would carefully put the little creature back into its home. I think in my books I honor my father by writing about small living things. And in a way I recapture those happy times.

What comes first, the story or the pictures? To me pictures need writing and writing needs pictures. A child once called me a picture writer, and that's a good way to describe me. It is the idea that comes first.

I start with a dummy book. A dummy book is eight sheets of paper folded and stapled to make a 32-page blank book, into which I sketch my idea. Sometimes it takes many, many dummy books before the pictures and the story are just right. It's hard work and you have to have faith in yourself.

When I start a book it's a lot of fun. After a while it is work, then it becomes labor. Towards the end it feels like slavery! After I have delivered the finished illustrations to the publisher, I become sad. But when I see the printed book, I am happy again!

How do you make your pictures? My pictures are collages. I didn't invent the collage. Artists like Picasso and Matisse and Leo Lionni and Ezra Jack Keats made collages. Many children have done collages at home or in their classrooms. In fact, some children have said to me, "Oh, I can do that." I consider that the highest compliment.

I begin with plain tissue paper and paint it with different colors, using acrylics. Sometimes I paint with a wide brush, sometimes with a narrow brush. Sometimes my strokes are straight, and sometimes they're wavy. Sometimes I paint with my fingers. Or I paint on a piece of carpet, sponge, or burlap and then use that like a stamp on my tissue papers to create different textures.

These papers are my palette and after they have dried I store them in color-coded drawers. Let's say I want to create a caterpillar: I cut out a circle for the head from a red tissue paper and many ovals for the body from green tissue papers; and then I paste them with wallpaper glue onto an illustration board to make the picture.

The video, *Eric Carle: Picture Writer*, shows exactly how I do this. Many children and teachers have seen the video and then made their own papers and pictures. You might want to try it. It's messy, but fun. The video is available from Philomel Books through your local bookstore or from Scholastic Books.

A number of readers of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* ask, **Why does your butterfly come from a cocoon, not a chrysalis?** That's a good question.

Here's the scientific explanation: In most cases a butterfly does come from a chrysalis, but not all. There's a rare genus called Parnassian, that pupates in a cocoon. These butterflies live in the Pacific Northwest, in Siberia, and as far away as North Korea and the northern islands of Japan.

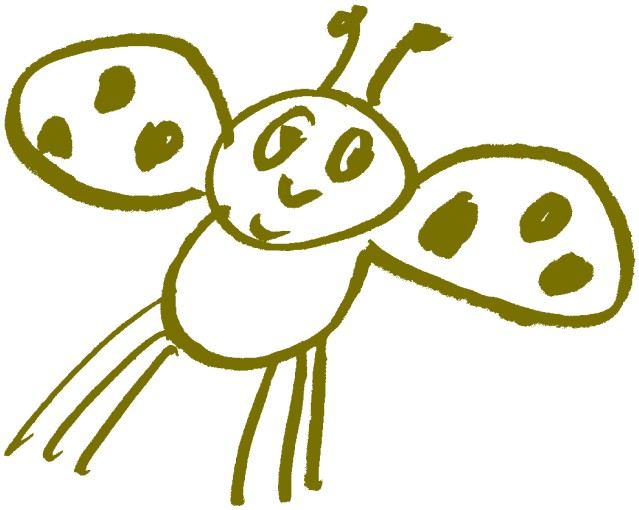
And here's my unscientific explanation: My caterpillar is very unusual. As you know caterpillars don't eat lollipops and ice cream, so you won't find my caterpillar in any field guides. But also, when I was a small boy, my father would say, "Eric, come out of your cocoon." He meant I should open up and be receptive to the world around me. For me, it would not sound right to say, "Come out of your chrysalis." And so poetry won over science!

Did I ever tell you how I came up with the idea for *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*? One day, over 25 years ago, I was punching holes in a stack of paper. Looking at the holes, I thought of a bookworm. Later, after working some more on the idea, the bookworm became a caterpillar. And that was the beginning!

Some of you, after reading *The Very Busy Spider* have asked, **How do you make the spider web?** Let me answer a question with another question. Have you ever noticed the raised letters on a business card or stationery? The same method is used to create the spider web. It's called thermography and this is how it works: A plastic substance is used to print webs on the paper and then the paper is baked in an oven. The baking makes the lines of the web puff up and harden.

How is the chirp in *The Very Quiet Cricket* made?
A computer chip has been placed inside the back cover. You can't see it, but perhaps you can feel it if you gently rub it. A tiny battery, the type used for cameras, supplies the power to make it chirp. The voice or chirp, comes from that computer chip. *The Very Quiet Cricket* in a way is a love story.

So think of this: Books have been around since Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press about 1440. Before that, books were copied by hand. But the computer chip makes *The Very Quiet Cricket* a very modern book. It's wondrous to see how combining the old and the new can create something that is magical.

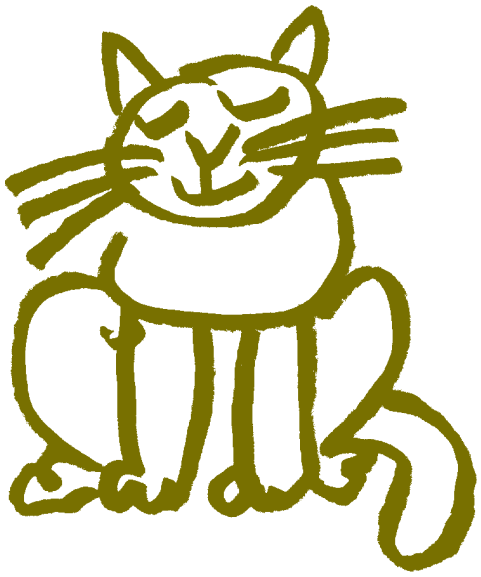


What is your next project? *My Apron* (published in the fall of 1994), pays tribute to a modern French painter, Fernand Léger (1881 to 1955). When I was working on it, I thought of him because Léger was a painter of the working class and this is a story about a worker, my Uncle Adam, who was a plasterer. By the way, this book comes with a child-sized apron.

In *My Apron*, I outlined the figures with a heavy black line, then superimposed it over the colorful collage. It makes the pictures bolder, stronger, the kind of pictures that should be in a book about working people.

Who are your favorite artists? Among my favorite artists are Paul Klee (1879 to 1940), with his colorful, dreamlike paintings; and Pieter Brueghel (1525 to 1569), who painted peasants and landscapes of central Europe that remind me of where I grew up in Germany.

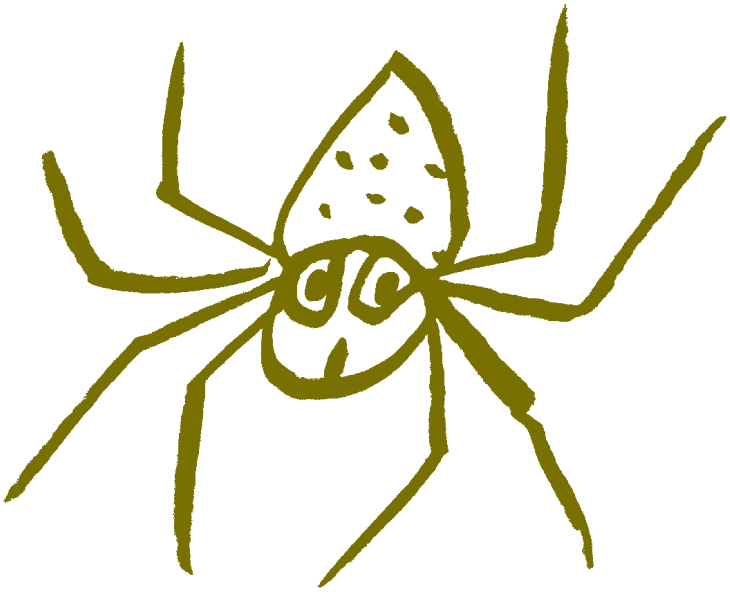
There is so much wonderful art in the world. If you are interested in Picasso, Matisse, Klee, Brueghel, Léger and other artists, you can find their work in museums and in art books.



Where do ideas come from? Parents, teachers, feelings, surroundings, experiences, dreams, likes and dislikes, things you've seen and heard, even your wishes... all these somehow add up to a story.

Do you have a wife? I am married to Bobbie. You might like to know that she was a teacher in early childhood special education and for many years worked with the parents of disabled children.

Do you have children? Yes. Cirsten, my daughter, and Rolf, my son, are now adults. They both studied art.



Do you have pets? Right now I have one shy, 13 year-old cat named Roberta. My wife and I had a Samoyed, a white dog, named Tock, who died several years ago. We loved Tock, who was named after the dog in *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. Norton is a friend of mine.

What is your favorite color? I love all colors. For me, however, the combination of colors is more important than the individual colors.

What is your favorite book? *Do You Want to be My Friend?* because it's about friendship.

Do you have any hobbies? I would have to say my work is my hobby. And my hobby is my work. Even when I'm not working in my studio, I might be thinking about future books. I will never retire from creating books, but I no longer visit schools or give talks. If you are interested in knowing more about me and my books, the video, *Eric Carle: Picture Writer*, will give you a good insight into my work.

How do I get started in writing or illustrating children's books? What works for me may not work for somebody else, so when people ask for tips on writing I can tell them only how I do it. I am a writer, not an editor, and I cannot judge stories by other writers or recommend publishers to them. If you're interested in writing or illustrating books, the following books may be helpful.

Real Toads in Imaginary Gardens: *Suggestions & Starting Points for Young Writers*; written by Stephen Policoff & Jeffrey Skinner, Ed. by Amy Teschner, (grades 5 and up), Chicago Review, Chicago, IL

How A Book Is Made; written and illustrated by Aliki, Harper & Row, New York, NY

Writing With Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books; written and illustrated by Uri Shulevitz; Watson-Guptill Publications, New York, NY

1994 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market; Writer's Digest Books, Cincinnati, OH

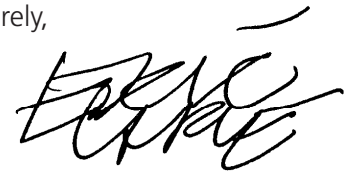
Writing Books for Children; written by Jane Yolen, The Writer, Inc., Boston, MA

Or write to: Society of Children's Book Writers, Box 66296, Mar Vista Station, Los Angeles CA 90066 for information about their workshops and newsletter.

I hope these answers are useful to you. I am always pleased when my books suggest new ideas and thoughts.

And here is somethings to look forward to: *The Very Lonely Firefly* will be released on the Fourth of July in 1995. Maybe you and your friends can figure out what kind of story this is and what kind of magic it will have.

Sincerely,



Some promotional materials about Eric Carle's books are available through the publishers. Write to:

Children's Marketing: Eric Carle Poster & Author Kit
Philomel Books
200 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
(send 10" x 13" SASE with 52 cents postage)

Marketing Department: Eric Carle Bio,
HarperCollins Children's Books
10 East 53rd Street
New York, NY 10022
(send #10 SASE with 29 cents postage)

Promotions: Eric Carle Poster
Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division
866 Third Avenue
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