

ERIC CARLE

1929 – Present

American Illustrator and Children’s Book Author

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Standards Information



The Art Heritage Program’s Eric Carle unit meets the following Colorado Department of Education-Visual Arts Standards (2009)

1. Observe and Learn to Comprehend
2. Envision and Critique to Transfer
3. Invent and Discover to Create
4. Reflect and Connect to Transfer



LEARNING TARGET:

- I know two important facts about Eric Carle.
- I can create a paper collage.

SUMMARY

- Eric Carle is known for his work as illustrator and creator of picture books for young children. His best-known work, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, has eaten its way into the hearts of literally millions of children all over the world and has been translated into more than 30 languages and sold over eighteen million copies.
- Although born in New York, Carle moved to Germany when he was six years old, was educated there and graduated from a prestigious art school in Stuttgart. He returned to America in 1952 to find work as a graphic designer in the promotion department of the

New York Times. Later, he spent many years as an art director of an advertising agency.

- He was “discovered” by Bill Martin Jr., a respected educator and author and hired to illustrate a story that Martin had written. Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? was the result of their collaboration. Thus, Eric Carle’s career began. Soon, Carle was writing his own stories, too. His first wholly original book was 1,2,3 to the Zoo, followed soon afterward by the celebrated classic, The Very Hungry Caterpillar.
- Eric Carle’s work is distinctive and instantly recognizable. His artwork is created in collage technique, using hand-painted papers, which he cuts and layers to form bright and cheerful images. Many of his books have an added dimension - die-cut pages, twinkling lights as in The Very Lonely Firefly, even the lifelike sound of a cricket’s song as in The Very Quiet Cricket - giving them a playful quality: a toy that can be read, a book that can be touched.
- Since the Caterpillar was published in 1969, Eric Carle has illustrated more than seventy books, many best sellers, most of which he also wrote.

**The Eric Carle unit includes a movie
approximately 27 minutes long.**

Observe and Learn to Comprehend & Envision and Critique to Transfer (VA 1 & 2)

SETTING THE SCENE

When Eric Carle returned to the United States from Germany in 1952, he entered the spectacular new world capital of visual arts. Before World War II, Europe was considered the center of the art world. However, after the war – when many artists fled to the United States to avoid persecution – the center of the art world shifted to New York.

Carle’s work was welcomed in the setting where irreverent, fresh approaches to advertising art, the poster, the illustrated magazine, and the children’s picture book were the norm. Another Art Heritage artist, Ted Geisel (Dr. Seuss) was also creating his advertising and children’s art during this time.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Eric Carle was born in 1929 in upstate New York. His parents were Erich and Johanna Carle, recent immigrants to the United States from Germany. Although his father had shown artistic talents and interests when he was young, his own father discouraged him from pursuing them, insisting that a career in the German civil service would be better for him. (Grandfather was a career customs official in Germany, who received recognition for honorable service rendered.)

Carle's young father didn't like the civil service position he'd trained for and chose instead to immigrate to the USA. In America, Eric's father worked for a washing machine company, spray-painting the washers.

Eric was an only child and enjoyed spending time outdoors in nature, camping, swimming and boating most weekends with his parents and their friends. He was curious about animals and enjoyed exploring under rocks or the bark of trees to discover what lived there. He showed an early talent for drawing and painting that his mother encouraged.

When he was six years old, his grandmother came to visit from Germany. She encouraged the family to move back, assuring them that the new German leader (Adolph Hitler) was promising an end to hunger, unemployment and inflation. Carle's mother was homesick for her family and friends and was intrigued by the assurances of new German prosperity. Their new multi-level home housed several generations and members of their family.

Eric found school to be quite different than what he'd experienced in the United States. A stern teacher provided tough discipline, and Eric missed his friends and former life in America. He enjoyed summer vacation, when he would visit farms owned by distant relatives or his grandmother's friends. He loved working around the animals, watching the bees fly to and from their hives, and hunting for berries. His mother made sure he received art instruction to continue his budding interests.

Life in Germany changed abruptly in 1939 when World War II began. Eric's father was drafted into the German army the same day that Poland was invaded. Eric, like many of his German friends, was caught up in the drama of the war. Despite the frequent bombings that destroyed the homes of many of his relatives and other homes in his neighborhood, Eric spent his time drawing tanks and fighter planes with exotic armament.

He continued to have art lessons from Herr Krauss, who explained to him that although he was compelled by the government to teach naturalism and realism, he appreciated the freedom and sketchy quality of Eric's work. Herr Krauss showed him reproductions of "forbidden art" done by "degenerate artists" such as Picasso, Klee, Matisse, Kandinsky and others. Krauss cautioned him not to tell anyone that he'd seen the art, but to remember their free and loose style.

In 1943, in order to save the future generation, students were evacuated from school and sent to live rural areas of Germany with local families. Eric was sent to the Black Forest area. He states he was welcomed as a new brother by the family he was assigned to live with. Boys sixteen years old were serving as anti-aircraft crews, and those seventeen and older were sent to the Russian front or other German outpost.

As the war continued and Germany became desperate, the students were again moved. This time they were sent to the front lines of the battle to join Russian and Italian prisoners of war, Polish "slave workers" and old German men to dig trenches. Carle's autobiography describes meager rations, hunger and illness suffered by many of the workers. One day, while cleaning out his mess kit in river after a meal, *"spurts of water erupt in front of me, as if from an*

underwater fountain. Sound travels very slowly: a machine gun-firing Mustang [plane] swoops past and pulls back up into the sky. Three men near me collapse in their blood and die. I develop sores on one of my legs and spend a few days in a makeshift hospital before I receive orders to return to Stuttgart.”

He states he doesn't remember much about how he managed to arrive home. However, soon after he arrived home, Carle was drafted into the Nazi army. The county was desperate for help and needed boys of fourteen and fifteen to be soldiers. The new soldiers who reported for duty found themselves retreating with the army toward Bavaria. There, the young soldiers who faced American soldiers in tanks, panicked and ran. Nazi storm troopers hung several of the young “deserters” as a warning to others.

The next morning, the soldiers awakened to see white bed sheets hanging from windows in the town. French colonial soldiers were marching through the streets. The war was over. Carle's father was reported missing in action but later found to be in a prisoner of war in a camp in Russia. He states his father never fully recovered from the war, and Carle grieved the loss of the dad he'd grown up and loved. The family was separated for over eight years.

After the war, as the country recovered, Carle found work as a file clerk with the US Army. He re-learned English and was able to not only feed himself but managed to bring home extra food and black market staples to his large extended family.

After a few months, Carle returned to finish school and received a recommendation from his art teacher, Herr Krauss to continue his studies with an emphasis in commercial art. At the age of 16 he was accepted into the *Akademie der bildenden Künste* in the graphics department in Stuttgart, Germany. He initially had some difficulty due to his immaturity, as he was much younger than other students and overcompensated to try to fit in. Rather than expelling him, he was told to work in the school's typesetting department. Carle states that the discipline of setting type by hand and the inherent rules and limitations of typography shaped his approach to his work for the rest of his life. He was later readmitted to regular art and design classes.

After graduation, Carle he became the art director of the promotion department for a fashion magazine. In 1952, after two years of experience as a graphic designer and poster artist in Germany, he decided to return to the United States. He worked briefly in the promotion department of the New York Times before being drafted into the American Army. In the Army, Carle's knowledge of the German language earned him a trip back to Germany, where he was assigned to be a mail clerk. Later, he was assigned to the special services division and stationed in his hometown of Stuttgart. He worked for the Army during the day, changed into civilian clothes and returned home to his mother's house every night.

He met and married Dorothea Wohlenberg when he was 25 and she was 19, shortly before being discharged back to the USA. After his discharge, the Carle's lived in New York where he resumed his old job with the New York Times. Two years later, he became the art director for an advertising agency that specialized in pharmaceutical advertising. The Carle's had two

children, Cirsten and Rolf. They separated and later divorced, which Carle says was very painful for him.

Eric Carle was a bachelor for 10 years, with his children visiting on weekends and vacations. He says that the children's excitement usually resulting in a few minutes of them happily running the length of his studio apartment, a fourth-floor walkup in a brownstone in Greenwich Village. The noise of running feet provoked complaints from the lady who lived downstairs. Mrs. Simpson called him repeatedly asking him to do something about his noisy children. Carle said finally he told her that perhaps he should just "line them up and shoot them." After that, Mrs. Simpson became their best friend, providing gifts and babysitting the children, and of course, encouraging them to run the length of the apartment all they wanted!

At about the same time as the marital separation, Carle became a freelance graphic designer and illustrator in the field of advertising. He had come to the conclusion that he didn't want to sit in meetings, write memos, entertain clients and catch commuter trains; he simply wanted to create pictures.

Dr. Bill Martin Jr, writer, editor and educator approached Carle about illustrating a manuscript for young children. The result was *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Carle was intrigued by this new inspiring approach to children's literature, which came at a time when much of children's literature was scientifically designed by educational experts and wasn't fun to read.

Carle began writing and illustrating children's books: *1,2,3 to the Zoo* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. He found that his early background as a graphic designer and his later interest in picture books fell into place. "The graphic designer wanted to push paper and print to their limits for the sake of creativity, interest, and intrigue. The storyteller wanted to create a touchable book that was also a readable toy, to make that very first day in school just a little bit easier."

Carle remarried in 1973 to Barbara Morrison, a special education teacher. They first moved to a home on fifty acres in the Berkshire Mountains, in the northwest corner of Massachusetts. Recently, the Carle's moved to a home in Northampton, Mass. "to spend the winter near shops, friends, movie houses, a library, a Chinese restaurant, and the post office – all within walking distance." They felt the winters in the country were too isolating.

Eric Carle says, "*Central to my work is this: I am fascinated by the period in a child's life when he or she, for the first time, leaves home to go to school. What a gulf a child must cross then: from home and security, a world of play and the senses, to a world of reason and abstraction, order and discipline. I should like my books to bridge that great divide. Some of my books have holes, cutouts, flaps to lift, or a raised, touchable surface. They are half toy (home) and half book (school). A book that can be touched and felt, a toy that can be read. And, indeed, don't we speak of grasping an idea, or of being in touch with our feelings!*"

Carle's books have many levels: "*funny animals, exciting colors, a story, humor, entertainment, mystery, emotional content – and learning. Depending upon a child's interest, ability, or curiosity, he or she can select the level where he or she feels comfortable. Some of*

these levels can and should be demanding and challenging. We just as often fail to address the “gifted” child as we neglect the “slow” child.”

Most children’s picture books have thirty-two pages. Carle carefully plans out how to place the pictures, develop the ideas and images, and how the story should end. He feels a book needs to be composed like a symphony, a duet, or a quiet piece of chamber music. A style and flow must be established. But, most importantly, he feels one should have an open mind and listen to one’s intuition. He reminds us to look at the crack in the ceiling and see it take on a shape and a voice.

Carle continues to write and illustrate books. He rarely accepts speaking engagements anymore, although he used to come to elementary schools and meet with children. His video is offered as a substitute. Since *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was published in 1969, Eric Carle has illustrated more than seventy books, many best sellers, most of which he also wrote. His work has been translated into more than 30 languages and sold over eighteen million copies. He sums his autobiography up with this note from a young fan, which was scribbled in tiny letters, squeezed into the upper corner of a page of paper:

Dear Eric,
You draw good. I like your pictures.
Our teacher made us read all of your
books.
Will you ever retire?
Love, Jennifer

Bibliography and Internet resources

- ❑ **The Art of Eric Carle**, Philomel Books, 1996.
- ❑ Carle, Eric. **You Can Make a Collage: A Very Simple How-To Book**. 1998, Klutz Press.
- ❑ The official Eric Carle site: <http://www.eric-carle.com/bio.html>
- ❑ The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art: <http://www.picturebookart.org>

How Eric Carle Creates His Art

*Eric Carle creates his artwork using a technique called collage. Even before he illustrated *Brown Bear, Brown Bear; What Do You See?*, he was using this method in his artwork for advertising illustrations. At that time he used store bought tissue papers, which were available in some four-dozen shades of color. From these tissue papers he cut or tore shapes and pasted them down with rubber cement on illustration boards.*

Later, Eric Carle started to paint on these commercially available tissue papers to add more texture; over time, however, he found that they were not colorfast and faded. He also discovered that rubber cement discolored the tissue papers and did not permanently affix them to the illustration boards.

Since the 1980’s, Eric Carle has been using archival quality materials. He creates batches of painted tissue papers, starting out with white sheets, without thinking about how he might use a particular colored or textured tissue paper. The papers are then stored in flat files, sorted by colors, and are used as a palette for his artwork.

REFLECT AND CONNECT TO TRANSFER (VA Standard #4)

During the last 5 minutes with your students, perhaps as they are creating or cleaning up, take a moment to encourage the students to discuss and review their understanding of Eric Carle:

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

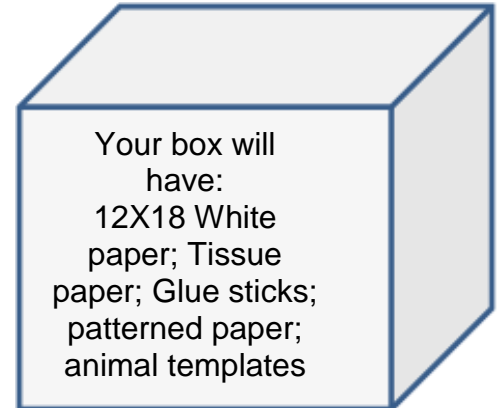
1. What was one thing you learned about Eric Carle?
2. How did Eric Carle use images to create?
3. How will you (did you) use paper and tissue paper to create?
4. What do you wonder?

FEATURED ART PROJECT

Invent and Discover to Create (VA Standard #3)

Students will make an animal collage in the style of Eric Carle.

1. You will need to cut the 12X18 paper in half, each student receiving one 9X12 piece of white paper.
2. You may use the animal templates to photocopy onto the construction paper (ask for instructions at your school about how to use your photocopier to do this) or students may draw their own simple animal designs in pencil on the paper.
3. Each student should have a selection of small pieces of tissue paper in several colors, and a glue stick. They will cut or tear small shapes from these pieces to collage onto their animal to fill in color. Students may use markers or crayons of their own to add some detail, if desired.



Attached you will find copy of the instructions to an accordion book project taken from Sax Arts online, which could be an alternative project.

Alternative Projects:

- Additional project information is included in the packet from “Celebrating Children’s Classics, Eric Carle” from the Pikes Peak Library District Children’s Department.
- A copy of “The Caterpillar Express: an occasional newsletter from Eric Carle” is included in your school’s box. Additional copies can be viewed at his website: <http://www.eric-carle.com/ceacro.html>
- <http://www.aflnc.org/projects/?p=104>

Additional Ideas The following are summarized from an area on his website that has

contributions from parents/teachers who have done projects related to Carle's books. MANY more ideas can be found at: <http://www.eric-carle.com/catexchange.html>

Brown Bear:

1. My class just did a project on book. We made our own book in the shape of a teddy bear titled "Oakcliff, Oakcliff What Do You See?" We presented it to a pre-kindergarten class, and we also went to Eastside Medical Center to present it to the patients. We each had our own page and we read our own pages aloud during the visits.
2. Our Kindergarten teachers took the *Brown Bear* text and adapted it to make monthly take-home books. For example, in December we created "Christmas Tree, Christmas Tree." We then took our illustrations, enlarged them, and laminated for the language center. We used this format to create take-home books for almost every month, season, or topic of study. Since the children learn the chant so easily, even our non-readers were able to "read."
3. I am preparing to use *Brown Bear* in a Family Learning Day to help parents put together literacy boxes for their special needs child. The box will contain stick puppets of the animals from the book, colored paper for the child to make a personal book, and textured materials (red glitter, green paper scraps, yellow feathers, fabric, etc.) to be glued onto drawings of each animal. The literacy box will also contain either the sign language for each picture in the book, or a Braille translation of each picture. Parents will learn to use these different tools with their child as they read *Brown Bear* with their child.
4. Have your students write a book in the style of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*. Each student should choose an animal and write a book about what that animal smells. Have the students think of their favorite smells: food, flowers, etc. This activity can also be used with other senses. The students like it. Eric Carle is universal. All ages love his books.
5. To get to know each other at the beginning of school, I take a photograph of each child in my class. I begin a class book with "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, who do you see?" On the next page I add a picture of a student and the caption "I see Aaron looking at me." I create a page for each student in the class in this way. I even include adults such as the principal and the secretary. Each page can be pulled out and replaced as students move or are added to our classroom. It has been very helpful for new students to quickly learn one another's names.

Eric Carle: Picture Writer

1. Our first graders viewed the video. We painted tissue paper and cut or tore it to illustrate two of the kids' favorite songs: "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and "Itsy Bitsy Spider." We now have two big books to use with future classes as they learn those songs. We plan to expand our classroom library each year with the Eric Carle study.
2. My first graders are absolutely enthralled by Eric Carle's books. As a culminating activity to our author study, we invite parents to join us for a morning of creativity. We watch the *Eric Carle: Picture Writer* video and then we paint! Each parent/child pair makes six papers using watercolors. As they dry, the children read aloud from their favorite books. When the papers are dry, the parent and child work together to make a collage of their own. I laminate all finished creations after the artists sign their work. We then have a snack--a sheet cake frosted to look like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Students who are now in high school come back to tell me that they still have their collages! What a wonderful way to celebrate books and reading!

The Very Busy Spider

1. Every year during August we explore a unit of insects and spiders. One classroom spider favorite is catching live spiders and keeping them in a closed container to observe. We then catch numerous other bugs and feed them to the spider. The students are curious how the spider catches them, kills them, spins them, and then eats them. Our observations continue until the unit is over and then we let the spider go. After students have observed real orb spiders webs on nature walks or from your classroom spider, encourage the students to notice the details and characteristics of the web. Then invite the students to create their own orb spider webs with spaghetti, glue and dark construction paper. Older

students can also create great webs with white or colored glue in the bottles on dark construction paper. When the glue dries, have the children make rubbings with crayons and chalk.

2. Our first graders made spiders and wrote sentences entitled "The Very Busy First Graders." (_____ was very busy _____ in school.) We pasted the sentences to the spiders and hung them from a web on our door. They were so cute!
3. After reading *The Very Busy Spider*, my second graders made their own cut paper collage illustrations which we made into a class book. Each student illustrated and wrote a page of something he or she wanted the spider to do. On the facing page they drew their own spider webs with a pencil. After the pages were finished, I laminated each page. Then the kids used white glue to trace over their pencil drawn spider webs. After the glue dried on the laminated page, it left a raised spider web much like the one in the book!

Other Eric Carle Ideas

- After an author study on Eric Carle, I ask each student in my class to choose his or her favorite book. The children write down their choice and their reason for choosing the book on a square piece of paper. When they are finished, they draw a picture to go with their writing. I put the square pages together to create an Eric Carle quilt. I even draw in stitch marks. This project has always turned out beautifully and it gives the children practice in giving evidence to support an opinion.
- My second grade students and I created an outstanding bulletin board to celebrate Eric Carle. Each child used watered down glue to paste their painted and torn papers onto a paper plate, creating layers of colors. We used all 24 plates to create a long caterpillar along the wall. I used an old Eric Carle calendar and spaced the pictures from it around the caterpillar, with a biography and picture of Eric in the top left corner. The whole display was mounted on large yellow roll paper! This was so much fun for the students, and our wall received great attention!
- I use Eric Carle's books to teach time, days of the week, reading, and art. Each year my class makes a picture by tearing strips of tissue paper. Each student picks a favorite book to illustrate. We create pictures by putting the strips on heavy white paper coated with starch. After coating the strips with starch, let them dry and then laminate. The pictures delight the students. From that day on they can tell me if a picture is an Eric Carle or not. It is a wonderful way to teach the meaning of the word illustrator.

I used Eric Carle's books during the month of May in my second grade class, primarily as a launching pad for the study of character traits.

1. Brainstorm characteristics with the whole class. For example: kind, mean, generous, selfish, fair, unfair, etc.
2. Read the book together. The first time, for the story content, and the second time, for character study.
3. Identify the traits of main character (*Walter the Baker*: hard working, generous, kind, fearful, etc.)
4. Children must prove what they say using evidence from the story.
5. Make a mini book, using one page for each characteristic.
6. Illustrate the book using Eric Carle painted paper collage techniques.

I did this with four stories: *Walter the Baker*, *Little Cloud*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and *Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me*. At the end of the lesson, we had a firm grasp of character traits that we were able to apply to other readings and we had beautiful products that we were all very proud of.