

EPISODE **69**

# Behind the Scenes with an Award Winning Illustrator

Guest: Helen Oxenbury

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## Meet Helen Oxenbury



You probably know many of the books Helen Oxenbury has worked on - *Farmer Duck*, the *Tom and Pippo* series, *There's Going to Be a Baby*, and of course, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt!* She's also illustrated the new book, *The Giant Jumperee*, which is destined to become a classic.

She's a two-time winner and four-time runner up for the annual Kate Greenaway Medal (the British Librarian's Award for Illustration) and for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that medal, her 1999 illustrated edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was named one of the top 10 winning works. She lives in North London with her husband,

John Burningham, who is also an author and illustrator.

## In This Episode

Sarah and Helen talk about creating picture books for kids, including how she chooses media to create atmosphere, and what it was like working together with her husband. Young illustrators will love listening in to this episode - Helen shares wonderful tips!

## The Listening Guide

**Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or listen to the entire podcast.**

- 1:37 Premium Access is opening soon!
- 3:03 Meet Helen
- 6:44 What Helen read to her kids
- 8:06 Working with her husband
- 9:45 The Giant Jumper
- 12:48 Helen's favorite illustration supplies
- 14:45 Using media to create atmosphere
- 18:20 Drawing babies
- 20:45 Artist tools
- 22:29 Behind the 'bear hunt'
- 25:45 Favorite animals
- 27:45 The practice of noticing
- 29:41 What Helen is working on next ... a 'Twinkle'
- 30:51 Let The Kids Speak

**I think it's absolutely astonishing.** When I did it I had no idea that it would be so loved by children. **It's an absolute, sort of total surprise.** - Helen Oxenbury on the book she illustrated, 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'

## Quotes and Questions

### \* **The process of illustration.**

“How it started out it didn’t finish up in the same way. It did evolve, which is what often happens with a children’s book. You sort of do some illustrations, ‘I could see it could be done in another way’ and then so you scrap what you’ve done and that’s how I went along. And it was great fun. Loved it.”

What an inspiring idea to share with our young illustrators! There are no mistakes in the artistic process!

### \* **The power of sad and heavy books.**

“I really think that’s the mark of an excellent book is when you finish it and you have, sort of, a ... even books that end up being heavy or sad in content, I think the best writers and illustrators still leave you at the very end with this underlying sense of hope and satisfaction.”

Do you share “sad” or heavy books with your kids? Books like [A Long Walk to Water](#) can help our kids learn to navigate challenges and adversity.

### \* **Field trip meets nature study!**

“My studio’s very near London Zoo and I go there a lot and I think what I would say is just look at animals, just look at them, see how they’re together. See how their legs are fitted onto their hips and how their heads are fitted onto their shoulders. I mean, that’s really the key is just looking. And practicing, I suppose.”

Do you have a young artist? Or an animal lover? How much would they love a trip to the zoo and a new notepad and box of colored pencils, markers or paints!

## Show Notes

### Books from today's episode:

- [We're Going on a Bear Hunt](#)
- [Farmer Duck](#)
- [There's Going to be a Baby](#)
- [Tom and Pippo](#)
- [Alice's Adventures in Wonderland](#)
- [Mr. Gumpy](#)
- [The Giant Jumper](#)
- [Rupert Bear](#)
- [Babar](#)
- [Dr. Seuss](#)
- [Tintin](#)
- [So Much](#)
- [Alice's Adventures in Wonderland illustrated by John Tenniel](#)
- [Tickle, Tickle](#)
- [The Baby Love series](#)
- [Eating Out](#)

### Other links from today's show:

- [RAR Premium Membership - Get on the waiting list now](#)
- [Gouache](#)

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com).