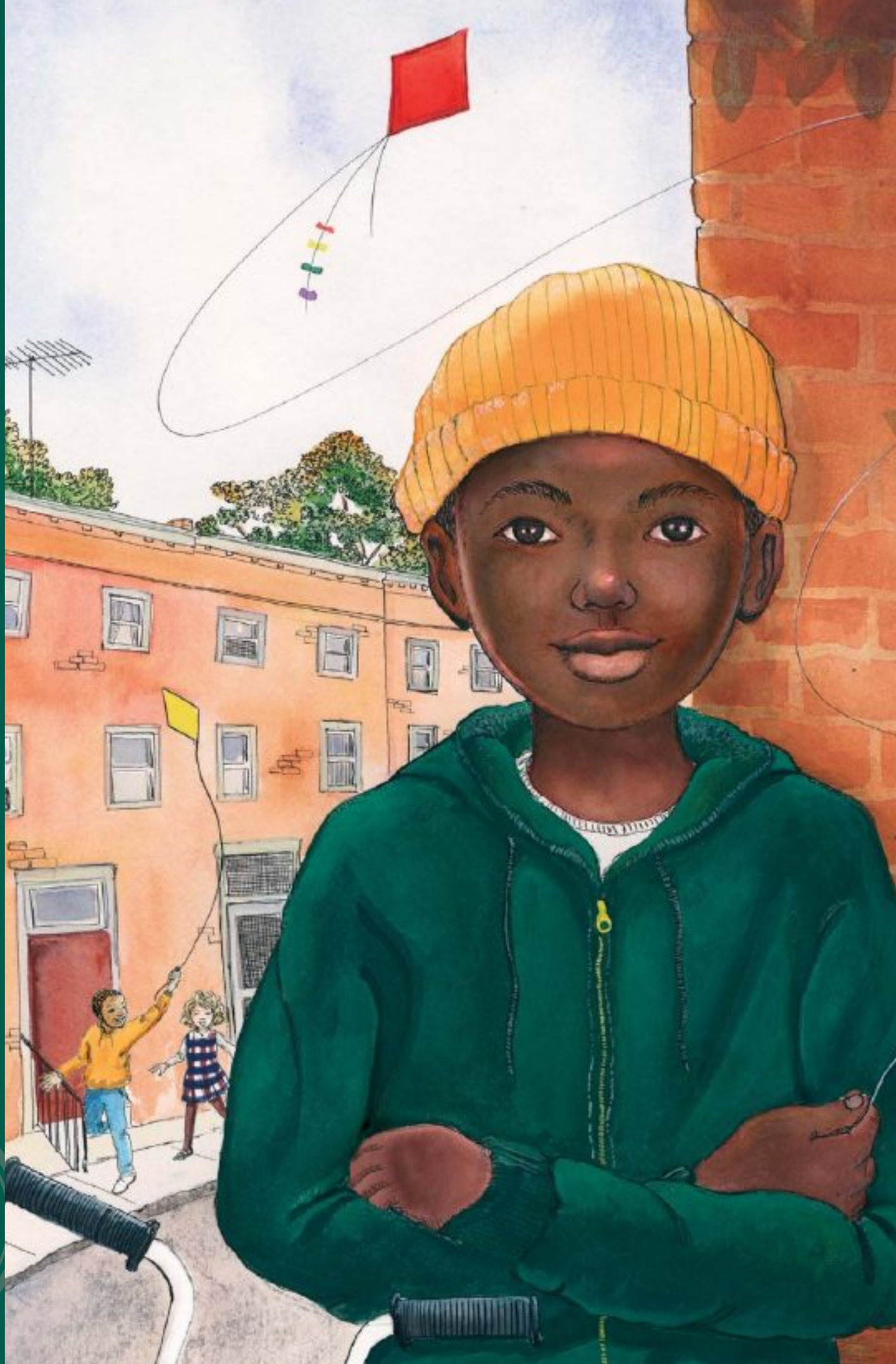
SCBWI

society of children's book writers & illustrators



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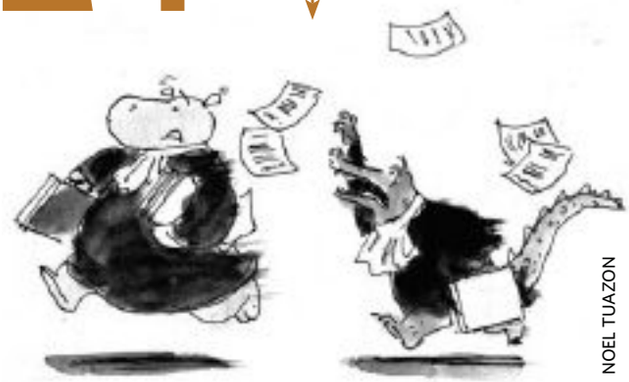

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Why Size Matters

When it Comes to Digitizing Art

BY PATRICIA PINSK

WHETHER YOU ARE a traditional or digital artist, understanding pixels and pixels per inch (PPI) will help you properly digitize your work. Images for a website or blog differ from print versions in a magazine or for purchase in an online shop.

The Basics

How your image is printed (four color separation or digital) determines the mode in which you need to create an image. Ask your print shop or client before you begin your work—to save you time and frustration.

Consider the following before creating your image:

- CMYK is for print in four color process e.g. a magazine.
- RGB is for web and digital use only.
- You can set the image mode within a decent graphic program. If you scan an image, you may need to convert it from RGB to CMYK—which is a bit tricky to color correct.
- Create or scan images at a minimum resolution of 300 PPI so they are large enough to print. You can always re-size to something smaller, but not bigger (otherwise distortion AKA pixelation occurs).

PPI and resolution

Generally for print, the greater the resolution, the better the print looks. Other factors such as printing press quality and ink affect the print. Ask your print shop for samples if you have quality concerns. Web images are generally 72 PPI. Smaller images load faster on a website, and occupy less server space. As long as no pixelation occurs, smaller file sizes are best. To test how your image looks, upload it and test it on a desktop computer as well as a small device. Things look differently on different devices. Keep in mind that people use different devices and settings. So, all you can really control is your image clarity.

To test how your image will look when printed, zoom in to 300 percent. If things look clear and sharp, your printed image will be okay. Also consider whether you are you printing at RGB or CMYK. You can't just convert from one mode to another without some color changes occurring.

It's best to use .tiff files for printing purposes, as they are uncompressed, unlike .jpg, .gif, and .pdf files. Some digital info is lost if an image is compressed. Although you may not see the difference in a small print, you'll see the difference in large prints.

To send large format files to your printer, there are USB flash drives that can hold 32GB, but viruses are a risk when using them on unknown computers. You can also use file transfer programs such as Dropbox. Just upload your files and share the link to them.

Patricia Pinsk lives in Vancouver, British Colombia. She holds a BFA from Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (now called Emily Carr University of Art and Design), a Certificate in New Media from Vancouver Film School, and a Certificate in Technical Writing from Simon Fraser University. www.patriciapinsk.com

Quick reference web versus print:

Web – saved at low resolution	Print – created or scanned at high resolution
72 PPI	300 (or higher) PPI
RGB mode for websites, blogs, some digital print shops	CMYK mode for four color print e.g. magazines
Cannot increase size for print or pixelation occurs	Can size down for web once it is in RGB mode
Save as .jpg for web images with lots of depth	CMYK to RGB conversion causes color shifts. Adjust color when converting from one mode to another
Save as .gif for web 2-D images	Save as .tiff or .pdf depending on your printer's requirements