



# Windows into Illustration: David Roberts

By *admin*

Created *Oct '09*

Article Author:

[David Roberts](#) [1]

[165](#) [2]

Article Category:

Windows into Illustration

Byline:

**David Roberts** explains his approach to **Tyrannosaurus Drip**.

The winner of the Nestlé Children's Book Prize Gold Award for **Mouse Noses on Toast**, illustrator David Roberts used a combination of techniques to create the artwork for Julia Donaldson's **Tyrannosaurus Drip**. Here David Roberts explains the thinking and techniques behind his illustration.

<!--break-->

As an illustrator I have many influences including Edward Gorey, Maurice Sendak, John Burningham, Gustave Doré, David Hockney, Heath Robinson and Aubrey Beardsley. I've looked at how these artists compose and create their pictures. I do a lot of black and white work and over the years have studied artists such as Gorey and Doré to see how they use line to create tone.

Obviously in a picture book, colour can also be used to create tone. For **Tyrannosaurus Drip** I combined the cross-hatching and small line technique I use in black and white work with colour to create depth particularly in the wooded backgrounds. I work with a dip-pen and black ink although I sometimes use pencil. I then apply watercolour and will often use layer upon layer of very wet paint sometimes washing it off and reapplying many times. This helps me create a strong colour that retains a translucent feel.

My main aim on this book was to create characters that portray the drama and in particular the humour of the story. The focus for me had to be on the facial expressions of the dinosaurs. By keeping the body shapes simple I could place more emphasis on a few key elements such as 'great big jaws and great enormous legs' and create comical, deadpan expressions that would reflect the personalities of the dinosaurs and really bring the characters to life.

[image:The duckbilled dinosaur world.jpg:left]

The first illustration shown here is of the duckbilled dinosaur world. Julia Donaldson created these characters as peaceful vegetarians who live harmoniously with their surroundings. I used different shades of green for the dinosaurs and their surroundings to create the feel that they belong and 'fit in'. I felt that their movement would be very fluid and considered and they would embrace each other and their surroundings in a gentle way. Their calm expressions reflect their peaceful natures.

Julia Donaldson separates the two dinosaur worlds by a river. I wanted to emphasise this separateness so used colour and form to show the stark contrast between the two worlds. In contrast to the peaceful green hues and jungle look of the duckbilled dinosaur world the second illustration shows the tyrannosaurus world as jagged and devoid of life. The tyrannosaurus destroy their environment and don't fit in with it so I chose to paint them in shades of red so they would stand out vividly against the backgrounds of steely blue and grey-black trees. I felt their movement would be

jerky and somewhat clumsy and their expressions would be wild about the eyes particularly as they sing their song celebrating hunting and war. I wanted to make them look rather ridiculous as they were doing this. The text describes them as having 'spiky little toothies' and 'scary little nails' so I mirrored these features in the thorny brambles that surround them.

Our hero, Tyrannosaurus Drip, does not belong to this harsh world. He doesn't fit in there so I highlighted him in a shaft of light, looking angelic, standing amongst the scattered bones of the tyrannosauruses' victims.

Illustrations from **Tyrannosaurus Drip** (Macmillan Children's Books, 978 1 4050 9000 1, £10.99 hbk). **Mouse Noses on Toast** by Daren King is published by Faber and Faber.



[David Roberts.jpg](#) [3]



[The duckbilled dinosaur world.jpg](#) [4]

David Roberts

Page Number:

3

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Feb '21):** <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/165/childrens-books/articles/windows-into-illustration/windows-into-illustration-david-roberts>

**Links:**

[1] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/david-roberts>

[2] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/165>

[3] [http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/David Roberts.jpg](http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/David%20Roberts.jpg)

[4] [http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/The duckbilled dinosaur world.jpg](http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/The%20duckbilled%20dinosaur%20world.jpg)