



# Windows into Illustration: Ken Wilson-Max

Article Author:

[Ken Wilson-Max](#) [1]

[240](#) [2]

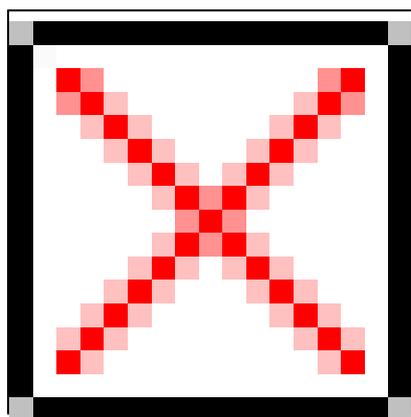
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Windows into Illustration

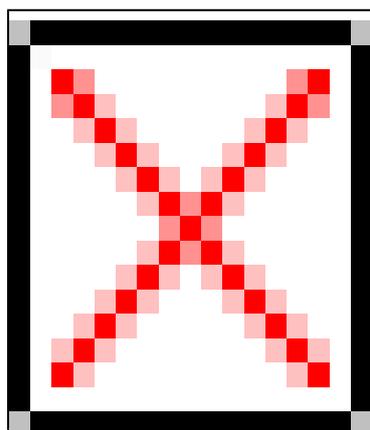
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Illustrator **Ken Wilson-Max** describes his technique and approach.

*Ken Wilson-Max is an award-winning author and illustrator. His books include **Where's Lenny?**, **Max Paints the House** and most recently **Astro Girl** and **The Drum and the Flute**. Born in Zimbabwe, he now lives in London. Ken is mentoring young illustrators as part of the **Pathways** programme into children's publishing and was in the list of **Breaking New Grounds** British writers and illustrators of colour. In 2017 he became publisher at **Alanna Max Books**, aiming to continue refining his inclusive approach alongside talented creators. Here he describes his approach to creating books for the very young.*

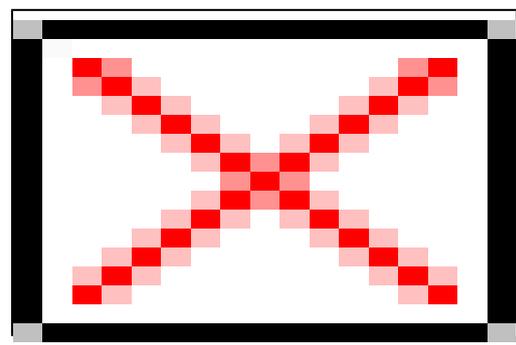


Working with pre-school children means leaving one's ego at the door and being prepared to do whatever it takes to help them understand and enjoy. The more open you can be, the better. Books like mine capture the little moments between people that I always hope young children will recognise. To achieve this, I have to observe how children and their parents or siblings are with each other. If I can sketch, I will do so, but it's not always possible. So instead I try to remember the feelings, sounds and sometimes smells that I notice. I use those to make sketches.

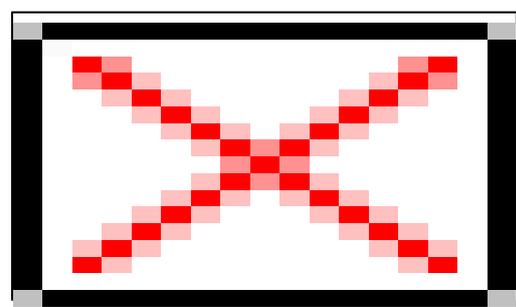


Being in the best mood possible before starting helps. You can't make positive images without feeling that way yourself. This isn't always easy or quick, so I normally work on it while brainstorming and sketching.

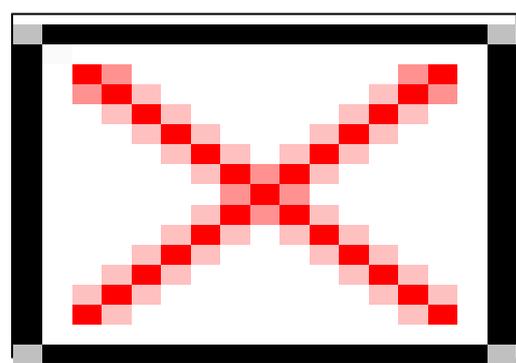
In **Lenny and Wilbur**, I wanted the readers to recognise the friendship between the two. The Lenny series is about emotions and the feelings in between the words. The texts are always sparse, so the images have to do a lot of the storytelling.



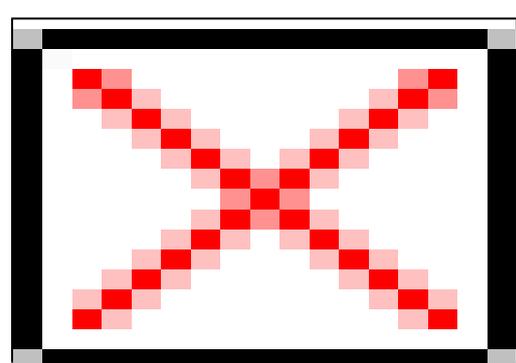
I make a storyboard in pencil first, then another one using a brush pen, both in a small sketchbook. This can go on for a few rounds before they are scanned and further manipulated in Photoshop. If the image is 'right' at that small size it only needs to be enlarged and used as a base for the final piece.



Then I start to experiment with colour and texture. Characters like Lenny always have to be the same. No variations! It sounds obvious, but when the work is printed, skin colours are affected by all the other colours on the image.



Once the storyboard has been amended and approved, it's time to paint. This is the time when the right mood makes or breaks the illustration.



I prefer sketching as much as possible and doing the final art pieces once, with lots of positive energy. Colours are definitely what they should be, and paint is laid on thick so brush strokes can be seen (and felt). I try to keep the colour palette simple, but the thick black lines help to keep some harmony if that doesn't work. Lately I've been loosening the paint strokes which I find gives the images more energy, but I haven't found another technique that brings out feelings as well as this way.

The **Lenny and Wilbur** books are published by [Alanna Max](#) [3] and **Astro Girl** is published by Otter-Barry Books, 978-1910959213. £11.99 hbk.

Page Number:

12

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