



# Windows into Illustration: Guy Parker-Rees

Article Author:

[Guy Parker-Rees](#) [1]

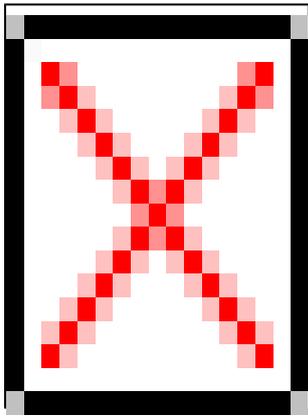
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Article Category:

Windows into Illustration

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**Guy Parker-Rees** on drawing **Dylan**

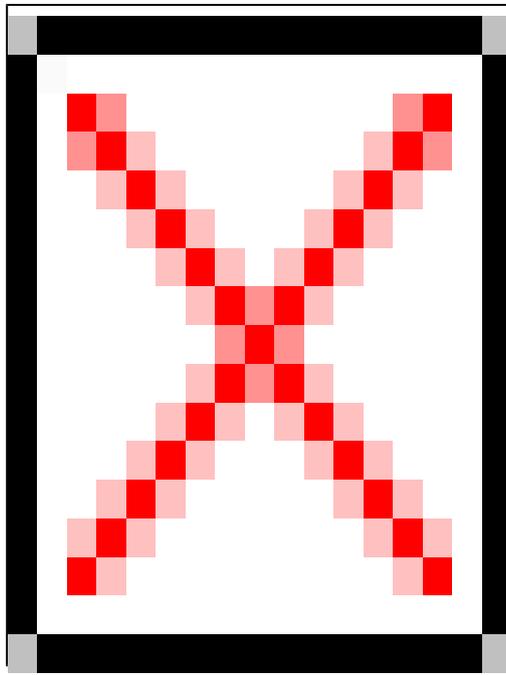
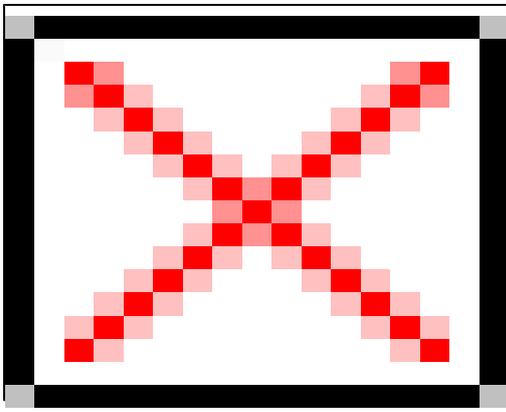


Guy Parker-Rees, the illustrator of many favourite picture books, from **Giraffes Can?t Dance** to **Down by the Cool of the Pool**, explains the thinking and technique behind his new series starring Dylan, an exuberant, stripy dog.

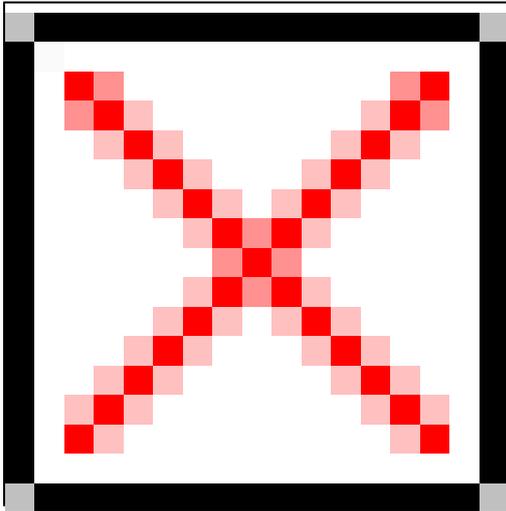
The Holy Grail for many illustrators is a free and fluid line. Maybe it?s always been the case: Hokusai talks of ?keeping the line alive? and Matisse says, ?Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence?.

I like the exuberance of colour. I want to be slapped around the chops by strong colours when I open a picture book. But it?s like playing with fire, if you don?t handle strong colours carefully they knock each other out and the emotional meaning is lost.

For a book like **Giraffes Can?t Dance**, I used a dip pen and ink and let the pen bounce freely along the paper. But I was finding that in my own painting and drawing I was attracted to the emotional value of coloured pencil and oil pastel. I liked the expressive qualities of the crunchier, colourful line.



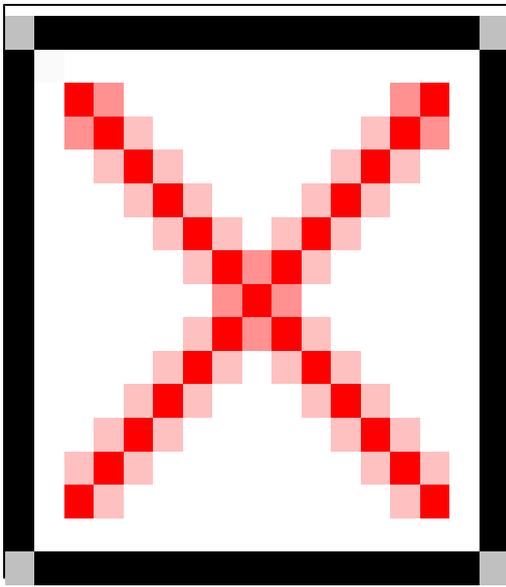
My **Dylan** books all evolved from one very loose sketch of a stripy dog character, created on a tablet many years ago.



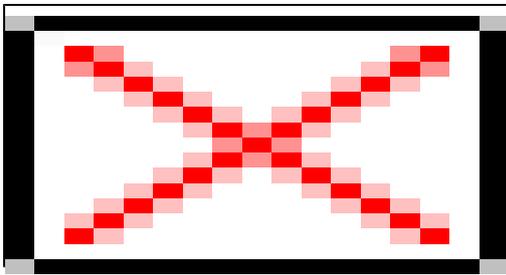
He kept looking at me from the wall of my studio, demanding I tell his story. I knew that I wanted to use this pencil/oil pastel line to tell it. His story would be about the mini dramas of growing up and getting on with other people.

When I was talking to my genius editor, Alison Green, she suggested making a series of **Dylan** books. So I had to think of a gang of friends and a whole world that could exist beyond the one book. The characters dash between each other's houses along a rolling path. It's probably more than a little inspired by the hills and distant sea glimpses of the South Downs, where I live.

I found that this new line worked well against a white background. Here's an early sketch of Dylan feeling very important as a teacher.

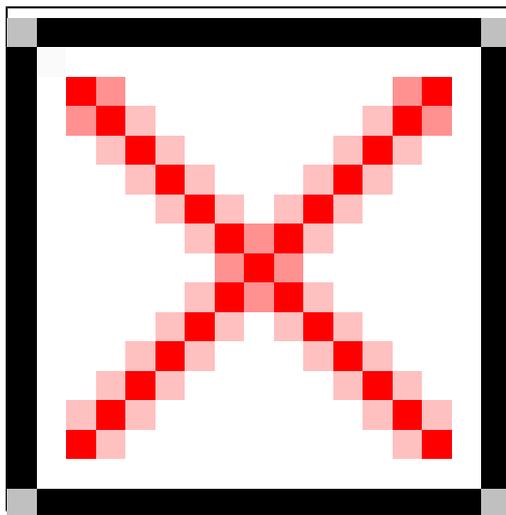


But I found the line was getting lost when there was colour behind it. With lots of trial and error and much encouragement and support from my rather brilliant art director/midwife, Zoë Tucker, a new style was born.



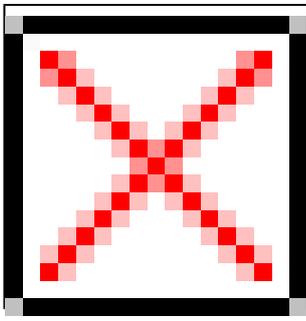
Once I have a rough drawing of how a page is going to work I loosely trace it onto watercolour paper with Transtrace. This gives me an idea of where everything is going to go. I then build up the coloured pencil and oil pastel line as spontaneously as possible and slop on the watercolours, acrylic inks and watercolour inks - whatever will get me just the right colour. I paint the characters separate from the background. I then get all the elements of the artwork scanned and returned to me. I draw the white cut-out line around each character on a separate layer then put it all together.

I also wanted a contrast in style between the indoor and outdoor spaces. Going outside is a big and important transition for a small child.



So the inside spaces are defined by a graphic line and flat colours whereas for the outside spaces I let rip with more watercolour, pencil and oil pastel backgrounds.

**Dylan the Teacher**, the third in the series, is out in August, then **Dylan the Baker** will publish next year. I'm very



excited that **Brown Bag**, the people who made [Octonauts](#) [3] are currently producing a series of Dylan animations.

**Dylan the Teacher** is published by **Alison Green Books**, 978-1-4071-7174-6, £6.99 pbk.

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