



Q&A with Author-Illustrator Aaron Becker



*How has your life changed after the success of your debut picture book, *Journey*?*

The biggest transition has been going from someone who always hoped to make picture books full time to someone who actually *does*. In the past, even when I started working on *Journey*, I was taking on all sorts of illustration work to make a living. Although it was all interesting work, there is nothing like waking up in the morning and realizing that all of my creative energy is going toward imagining my very own stories and worlds. At first it was actually unsettling to realize there was no one in charge but me, but I'm getting used to it!

*Both *Journey* and *Quest* have a definite cinematic appeal. What, if any, skills have carried over from your time working in the film industry?*

It's interesting, because when I started work in film, I had never actually done a complete full-color illustration before, just lots of life drawing during two semesters of art school. But my art director took a chance on me, and over the course of the next eight years, I learned the craft. There's no substitute for being surrounded by talent, and I'm eternally grateful for the company of my coworkers. Just sitting across the desk from amazing draftsmen, painters, and storytellers did the trick. This was my real education in the technical requirements of storytelling. How do you convey a story on a strictly visual level? How do you direct the reader's attention? What makes good design work well? How do you paint with dynamic colors and values? What sort of compositions can inform, entertain, and tell a story? This is what I practiced every day at the film studio for many years.

I've also enjoyed putting together the book trailers for my books. It's a nice outlet for the film side of me. At some point, I'd love to work on an adaptation of these books into shorts or animated films. But for now, I'm content with the relative simplicity of telling a story in a physical book.

*Tell us about one of the most memorable experiences you've had sharing *Journey* with a group of young readers.*

One of the things I do when I share *Journey* is ask the audience what they think the title means. For me, I just imagined something simple like, "It's an adventure." But the kids come up with far better answers. One of my favorites is: "It's when you go on a trip but you don't know where you're going to end up." That's just so amazingly insightful. And it continues as I open the book. The children are always seeing things or noticing things that I hadn't thought of before — and I made the book!

What is it about creating wordless picture books that appeals to you as an artist?

I just received a note from a parent who wrote about how *Journey* had really helped her six-year-old son get into reading. He had been intimidated by the pressure to learn to read, but the wordless format gave him an in. This was me as a kid. I didn't get reading. I found making the connections between the written word and an internal, mental construction to be difficult and abstract. But I could gaze at the images in picture books for hours on end. Don't get me wrong — I've since come to appreciate the unique power of well-constructed language. But I have to say, it's not a comprehension that comes from my natural state of being. Pictures are where I've always felt most at home, so it comes as no surprise to me that I choose to tell stories with them, and them alone.



And Now On to What Aaron Does Best: A Visual Q&A

If you had your very own magic red and purple markers, what's the first thing you would draw?



When you were a boy, what did you dream of being when you grew up?



What is your favorite rainy day activity?

