SPOT

story, concept, and art by David Wiesner

About David Wiesner

"By his redeployment of everyday items—a fish, a string bean, an amphibian—Wiesner suggests that fantastical things are happening all around us, that our dreams are closer than we think—whether those dreams belong to humans, clouds, or frogs." —Andrew Leonard, *New York Times*

David Wiesner is one of the world's most celebrated visual storytellers. The creator of many best-selling picture books, he has been awarded three Caldecott Medals—the nation's highest illustration honor—for *Tuesday, The Three Pigs,* and *Flotsam* and has also won three Caldecott Honors for *Free Fall, Sector 7*, and *Mr. Wuffles!* His picture books have been published in more than a dozen countries and have won numerous additional awards in the United States and abroad.

Mr. Wiesner grew up in suburban New Jersey, known to his classmates as "the kid who can draw." He went on to become a student at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where he was able to commit himself to the full-time study of art and to explore further his passion for telling stories with images. An acknowledged master of the picture book format, Mr. Wiesner has also made forays into new media, including the interactive story, *The Day the World Broke*.

The Spot Story

As a student at RISD, David was struck by the idea of creating a story that didn't follow linear dimensions. At the time, no technology existed that could allow him to truly explore this idea, although in titles such as *Flotsam* and *The Three Pigs* he pushed the boundaries of linear storytelling on the printed page.

When the iPad was introduced, David realized it offered the technology necessary for this forty-year-old idea to come to fruition. From that came Spot, an ideal combination of David's beautiful artwork and relentlessly inventive imagination. Through Spot, David has brought to life a universe that allows other dreamers, imaginers, and storytellers to create endlessly varied tales every time they open the app.

Welcome to Spot

Spot is an app unlike any other. A visual adventure—one that is never the same twice—unfolds as you travel through spaces that transition into one another via the Pinch-and-Zoom feature of your iPad. With a pinch and a zoom you move through dazzling scenes, delving into worlds within worlds realized in gorgeous original artwork by David Wiesner.

Peek under an armchair and visit the dust bunnies in Lower Rügg, wander among the robotic shoppers in the marketplace of Mekanikos, watch the glorious cat parade in Katzaluna, go on an underwater adventure in Oceana Prime, or take in the beauty of the universe in an intergalactic space station. Hotspots transport you from world to world and back again, and it's up to you to decide where the story will go next!

Interacting with Spot in the Classroom

• In Spot, as in many of David Wiesner's books, things are not always what they seem: what looks like an ordinary cookie or pencil may contain a portal to another world! Ask students to choose an ordinary object to think and write about in this extraordinary way—for example, what if a basketball is a planet populated by creatures too tiny to see?

• Ask students to design, plan, and create their own comic or graphic novel based on one or more of the Spot worlds. How do the pictures tell the story? If they choose to add dialogue, how does the dialogue move the story along?

• Ask students to write a news story about the cat parade for *Meow* magazine. Include who, what, where, when, and why!

• David Wiesner included five vastly different worlds in Spot, from space and underwater settings to worlds populated by robots, animals, or miniature creatures. Ask students to draw, paint, or sketch a sixth world that could exist within the app.

Interacting with Spot at Home

• Explore the world under the armchair with your child. Ask your child what he/she thinks is going on under your own couch in your living room. Are there dust bunnies there? What do they think of the humans living in the house?

• In the underwater world, a group of starfish are about to pull the drain plug. Ask your child what he or she thinks will happen if the plug to the ocean is pulled!

• Encourage your child to explore the world of robots and ask your child what he/she thinks a robot pet would look like. Have your child draw or paint this robotic pet.

David Wiesner on Spot

The Origin of Spot

DW: The blinding flash of inspiration came while I was killing time in an Apple store in Chicago. I had never picked up an iPad before, and I had no idea what to do with it. Someone showed me how to move my fingers across it, and how, if I pinched my fingers, I could make stuff small—or really big. I suddenly went, "Wow! This would be a great way to explore an idea I've been playing around with since art school."

So the origin was an assignment that I did for a class with David Macaulay nearly four decades ago. We had to create a transition from one well-known image to another. I'd chosen King Kong on top of the Empire State building and da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. I saw the transition as essentially a camera movement, zooming out from King Kong to the island of Manhattan. The island became the negative space within the surrounding dark waters, which, as you moved away from them, became the shape of a letterform. Moving even farther away, the image dissolved into writing that became the words below the da Vinci drawing.

What was intriguing to me was that the transition was not a literal one. The initial image was just a very small part of the bigger picture when the viewer moved into a different reality. These shifts were *graphic* transitions, based on things like shape, color, and positive and negative space.

I was always fascinated by the idea of worlds within worlds, and I would come back to the concept again and again over the years. I even had a contract for a book called *Spot* in the mid-1990s, but my attempts to use the worlds-within-worlds concept to generate a story never came together satisfactorily. I was able to use an element of it in *Flotsam*, though. The use of pictures within pictures within pictures took that book to another level.

In the back of my head, I still thought there might be a chance to explore this idea of transitions on a bigger scale. It all came together the moment I looked at the iPad.

Shortly thereafter, I was visiting my publisher and reviewing versions of my books that had been created for tablets. I asked if they would ever be interested in publishing an original app—and it turned they were considering asking me the same question! And with that we were off and running.

Nonlinear Storytelling

DW: Most of the apps filling up tablets at that moment were book-based or game-based, and even the book stuff tended to have games in it. I knew I wanted to make something that was all narrative without a gaming aspect—with no interruptions to the narrative flow. I'm working with a loose definition of the word "narrative," but it is consistent with how I make my books—using images rather than words to set up characters, situations, and environments.

Narrative Threads

DW: Each of the worlds in the app is its own little set of stories, but there are two overarching threads that run through the app as well. The first is a story about a group of three aliens who are visiting other worlds. One of them, a young one, gets lost or perhaps is the adventurous type who heads off on his or her own. We follow the other two aliens as they search for this kid through the worlds. Because the vignettes will be encountered in a random order, the nature of that story will reveal itself—or not—depending on the individual user. There's an open-ended quality to the narrative that leaves room for interpretation.

The other running thread is the presence of the bugs whom we glimpse during the transitions—they exist outside the embedded worlds. They seem to control a lot of commerce, and their logo is all over the place. They have an omnipresent view of everything going on. I'm not sure even I can say what their story is, but I'm willing to go with the mystery of it. As with my books, some people may be puzzled, and others will just dive right in and go with the flow.

David Wiesner on Spot

The Space Between Books & Apps

DW: When I studied apps, it seemed the people who made them were taking books and putting them on tablets—or else were trying to create new experiences but were still thinking of them like books. And it seemed to me that using the book as a model was pointless. A book does what it does better than anything else can.

Apps would only really get interesting as a storytelling medium when someone took advantage of the inherent properties of the device on which they are viewed, moving away from the book model. So that's what I set out to do, but one of the first big quandaries was: Oh my gosh, how will I know where to end anything? The space seemed so vastly open, and trying to conceptually wrap my own head around it was a bit overwhelming.

But the reality is that there are limitations to an app in the same way that there are parameters for a picture book, such as a fixed number of pages. Even in an app, there is only just so much pixel space for assets, so decisions have to be made based on what there is room for. When there were things I had visualized one way, and it turned out there would be a space problem, the reality was that I had to find more creative means of including them. One result is that the pieces relate to each other in meaningful ways: I had to have a reason for everything in the app—just as I do for my books—and everything is there because it has a narrative reason to exist in that place.

What is Spot

Spot is a narrative experience. I don't see the app specifically as a creative writing tool, and I don't see it as a game or a display of art. It's a different kind of story, and a different kind of reading, from the traditional plot arc with a set beginning, middle, and end. In Spot, you control your way through the app, making active choices, exploring the way you want to, and setting the pace your self.

With the ability to move back and forth between worlds at will, there's something about the app experience that feels new and unique. It's not only what you see, but the way you see it that creates the experience.

The Creative Process

DW: When I'm creating a book, I'm working out the story and the visual telling of that story to the point where the book is exactly what I want it to be. I finish all the art and then turn it over to Production, the department that makes the physical book. My work is essentially done.

The pace of working in the digital world is such that I was creating the art as the app was being made from it. The story elements evolved as I worked. Ideas and images would pop up and force me to look at what was happening, and the exciting thing is that connections and possibilities would reveal themselves. Almost like improvising—which was okay! [Spot] evolved on its own and became its own thing; it went in its own direction. I wasn't trying to force something on it, and I'm happy about that.

The Spot Experience

DW: I hope users will respond to Spot the way I like to get caught up in works of art, written or visual—becoming immersed in another place, absorbed into the world that has been presented without letting go of expectations of being told a story. It's there: go in and experience the elements and draw your own conclusions.

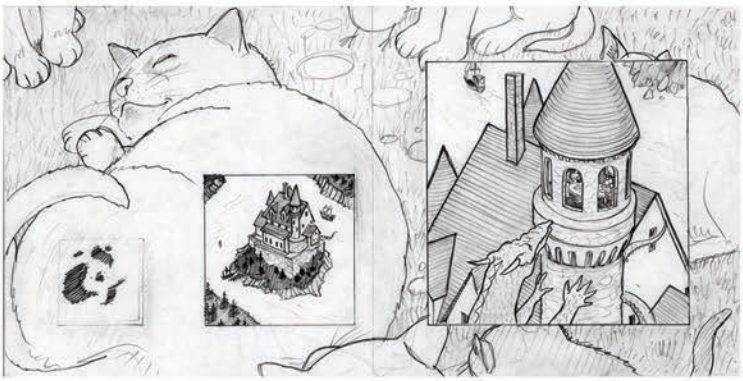
I'd like kids to enjoy as much as I do the experience of saying: What is that? What is going on, and what *else* might be going on? And of being able to follow the questions to other places—wherever imagination wants to take them.

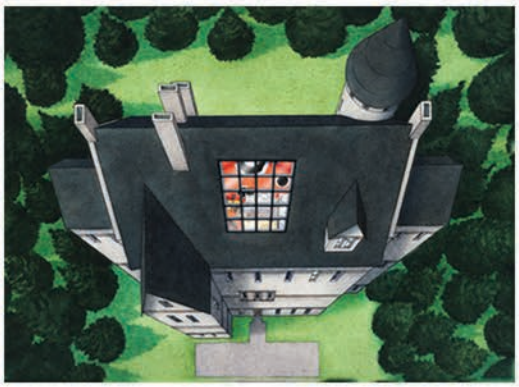
My books reach a wide age range, being used and enjoyed on many different levels. In the same way, I want the youngest app users to be engaged as well as older kids, but that isn't a limitation. I hope users of all ages will be absorbed and find their own stories.

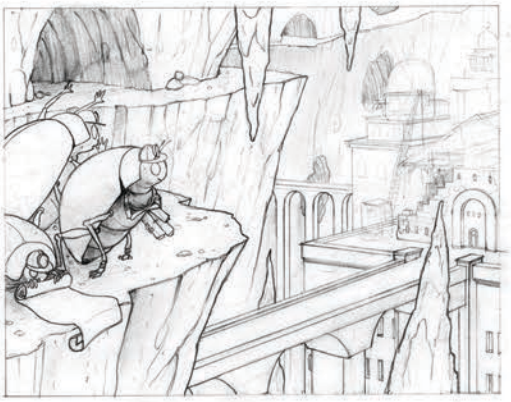
Development and Production

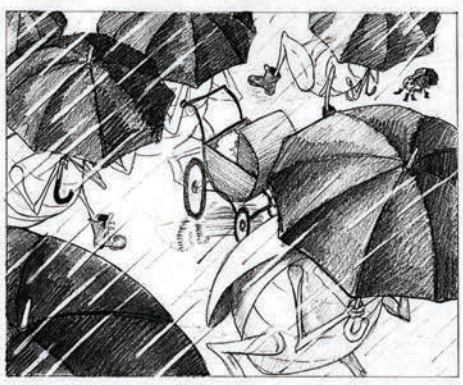
David was involved with the development of Spot every step of the way. He first shared sketches and color guides for each world and each transition to help the developers built the framework for the app. David then provided beautiful, hand-painted watercolors of every element in the app, including various characters, background images, and full transition scenes.

He digitized the final art and sent to the developers who optimized the images for retina display. David then guided the team in composing the art and bringing the worlds to life on the screen. David worked closely with the developers throughout this process to be sure that each detail, from the shading on a character to the flow of the navigation, was true to his vision.



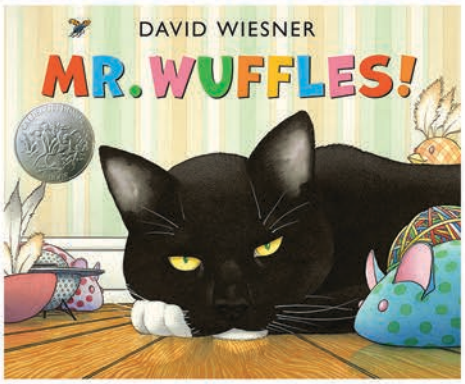




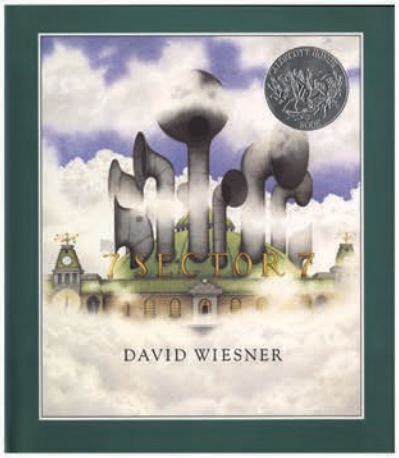


David's Literary Works

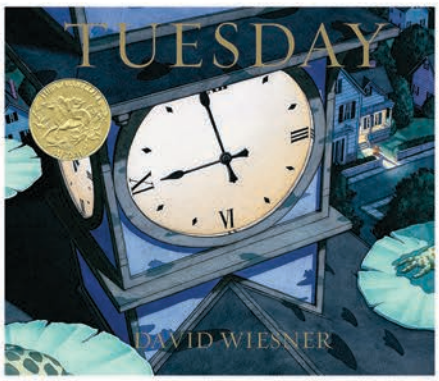
Mr. Wuffles
HC 978-0-618-75661-2
E 978-0-544-15147-5



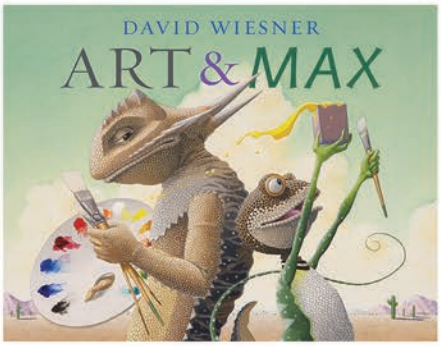
Sector 7
HC 978-0-395-74656-1
E 978-0-547-53314-8



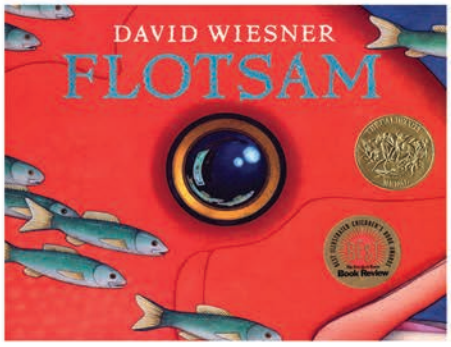
Tuesday
HC 978-0-395-55113-4
PB 978-0-395-87082-2
E 978-0-547-86029-9



Art & Max
HC 978-0-618-75663-6
E 978-0-547-74016-4

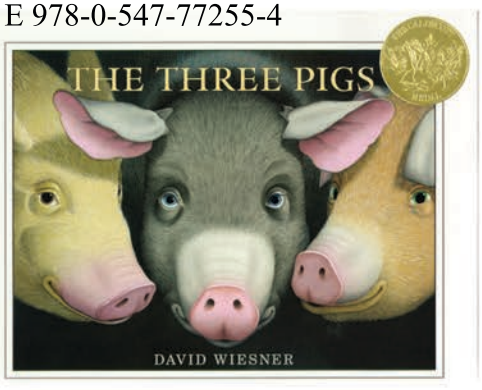


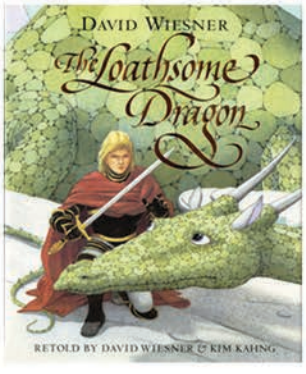
Flotsam
HC 978-0-618-19457-5
E 978-978-0-547-75930-2



June 29, 1999
HC 978-0-395-59762-0
E 978-0-547-53180-9

The Three Pigs
HC 978-0-618-00701-1
E 978-0-547-77255-4



Hurricane
HC 978-0-395-54382-5
E 978-0-547-53169-4

The Loathsome Dragon
HC 978-0-618-54359-5
E 978-0-547-80771-3