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## **Pitch Ready Picturebook: A How-To Guide in 15 Days** with Sanae Ishida

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### **Chapter 1 - Pitch Ready Picturebook: A How-To Guide in 15 Days**

#### Overview

- I've wanted to write and illustrate children's books since I was a little kid, but it wasn't until my early forties that I started to take small, consistent actions to assemble materials to pitch that my world opened up. And now I've published over 30 books, including translations. My name is Aya Sheda and I'm an author, illustrator, and maker of many books, including baby board books, a variety of children's books, craft books, and more to come in This How to Guide. I'll lead you from Ideation to Pitch Ready picture book. Once your storyboard, also known as Dummy is ready. I'll help you get it ready for pitching. I'll take you behind the scenes of working with publishers and agents and I'll give you everything you need to set you up for success. It requires persistence, but seeing your idea turn into a tangible picture book feels amazing.

#### Day 1 - Process overview

- Over the next two weeks, I'll show you how to take your picture book idea and get it ready for pitching. Let's begin with the presentation I created that covers the entire process from beginning to end. So far, I've published eight children's books and I'm working on my ninth right now. Here are the eight. They include board books and hardcover, picture books. And the process for me begins with what I call the storyboard, but is often referred to as a dummy as well. And it's basically the entire story and miniature format that just gives you the sense of flow of the story and the images. I tend to be more visual, so I like to start with the images, and then the words get attached to the images or each page. And then that eventually needs to be developed into a separate manuscript. And then I go to the editor and say, what do you think about the storyboard and the manuscript? And if they say, okay, then I proceed to the rough art. And the rough art is normally gray scale, black and white. It's just to give it the full size compositional look and feel for the entire book. And then it goes through, you know, editing. I say, what do you think? And if they say, good, I proceed to the final art. And for me, I tend to work in traditional media watercolors, or I have been working in digital watercolors as well. But the process is similar. I paint each element separately and then bring them together. Here's some more painted elements. If I'm working traditionally, I scan them into Photoshop and collage them together. And then here you can see what the rough art looks like. And then we proceed to the final art. And I have more examples, rough art, final art. Obviously the final art is a lot more refined with details and more color. And sometimes when I'm painting my final art, you know, something I see in my brain doesn't exactly translate when I paint it. So I'll do it over and over and over until I get what I actually have in my brain onto paper or screen if I'm using digital watercolors. And then we get to the most important part, which is the cover. They often say, don't judge a book by the cover, but this is a lie. The cover really matters. So for my very, very first book, it's called Little Kenichi, the Ninja Girl. They asked me to come up with a few concepts. They always asked for a few concepts, and I came up with five. My favorite was this all black cover was going to be very incognito. You wouldn't be able to see much unless you angled the book and it would show the title. And they said, no, that's not gonna work for us. The one that they said they did like was this one with little KCI standing on a tiny little hill with some backgrounds. But they said they like that, but can you make it a little better? And so I made little KCI wear a purple costume, which is a traditional ninja costume, but they said, Hmm, not quite, not quite what we're looking for. So I

changed the background to pink and to green and all sorts of other colors. And they said, well, okay, let's go with the green, but we need more details. So I added the flowers and they said, well, I don't know. It's still not quite working. So I ditched the mountains in the background and we made it simpler. When you're working on final art, you don't include any text unless it's hand drawn text. So this was what got approved for Little Kunai. You can actually see it here in its final form with the font, the text added for my next book, Chibi Samurai Wants a pet. It's part of the series of the ninja book. I came up with four cover ideas and then this one got selected, which was my favorite. So that was exciting. The third book of the series is B on the Ninja Grandma. And for this one, I came up with only three ideas. So every single time I was coming up with less cover ideas, but luckily all my favorites were getting chosen. There's some back cover art here too, with the Bcha Ninja grandma. And whenever I do this presentation, I often do these at school visits. I get the question, how long does this process take from beginning to end where I turn in all the, the manuscript, the final art, and if I were working straight through just, you know, starting with rough art and all of that, the storyboard and manuscript, you know, typically one to two weeks, the rough art, I would say a couple weeks, the final art, four to five weeks if I did it, you know, without taking any breaks. And then the cover is actually surprisingly quick because the interior art's all been done. So coming up with a cover idea tends to be fairly fast for me, which is a couple days. And then there are all these other elements that need to be added, like the back cover and end papers and just miscellaneous spot art. And that if I did it all, you know, all together is about three days. So for me personally, the work time is roughly two to three months. However, there's a lot of that. What do you think? Feedback and editing and checking, fact checking. And sometimes when I use Japanese, they have to have native speakers come in and check on that. So after all of that back and forth, and when it finally goes to the printer and comes back on as the physical book, it can take about 18 months to two years. It's a very, very long process. So if you were in the first grade, you would not see your book until the third grade. That's my experience of the big picture. And I'm so excited to explore with you the storyboard and manuscript portion of the process.

#### Day 2 - Sanae's books and storyboards

- I've worked on various kinds of picture books and here are some considerations for you. When you think of picture books. This is what you would probably imagine a hardback cover. And there are 16 pages in this book, which is standard because the way printers work for books is there's a very large piece of paper and 16 pages are printed on that sheet of paper. So it would be in multiples of 16 or multiples of four or eight, depending on the printer. So in this case, with this book, this is 40 pages instead of 32 pages. And then you know you could have a jacket. And then the interior cover board books are also considered part of picture books. And as you can see though, with board books, they tend to be smaller and they are printed on regular paper first two pages each. So two pages is considered a spread like this, and then the paper is pasted onto cardboard. Board books are almost always shorter in length, so this one is 20 pages and smaller in dimensions. There are a few typical standard dimensions in terms of height and width, but there's a lot of flexibility in terms of that. For picture books, an important thing to consider is the age range of the audience. So board books would be zero to three. You know, these picture books are generally elementary school age. These are younger elementary school kids, so kindergarten to second grade. This is for slightly older kids, so I think this is third to seventh grade is what we were marketing it as. And the other thing to keep in mind is the word count for picture books. With board books, you really don't need very many words. Typically, you know, it's a few words per page. Some don't even have any words, it's just all

pictures. For standard picture books like these, it would be about 500 to a thousand words. These questions will help clarify the kind of picture book you want to create.

#### Day 3 - Art materials and templates

- There are no hard and fast rules about tools and materials to create a storyboard, but here are my favorites. My go-to supplies for storyboarding is a sketchbook. This one is blank pages and a pen. Sometimes I like to paint with watercolor, so this is a watercolor sketchbook, got my brushes. I might sketch with pencil first and then paint with my watercolors. I also like playing with other fun art supplies like pens, and this is brush markers, colored pencils. I've created storyboards with index cards, you know, using the various supplies. And a similar idea is this template I've created with spreads already on them that can be drawn into to create your storyboard. And if you've taken my watercolor procreate class, you know that I love working digitally as well, and these templates can work inside procreate. Whether you use the index cards or the template or even the sketchbook, the storyboard is important because it gives you the bird's eye view of the full story. We start small so we can work fast, and then we will refine later into a larger storyboard. Whatever your medium, the goal is to capture the story in smaller form.

#### Day 4 - Inspiration and ideation

- Maybe you've had a picture book idea for years, or maybe you're looking for some inspiration. I'd like to share some of my ways of sourcing ideas for books. Some of my best ideas have come from walks. When I was walking one day, I passed this little cafe and it said, tiny Ninja. And I thought, huh, tiny ninja, little ninja girl. And that led to my little ninja book, which led to my next idea and then to my next. Another example is I was rifling through some of my old sketches, and I came across this drawing I did of a sumo baby. I created this 15 years ago and had forgotten all about it. And I thought, wow, wouldn't it be so fun to have a board book series of baby sumo wrestlers? Let's do an inspiration exercise together. I have my sketchbook here and I call it idea mapping, but it's a pretty loose process where I'll just think of a word or a memory and let's say tiger. And then I just think of all the things that pop into my mind that's related to tiger. So it might be orange. I remember there was a book I read about a tigers and a certain kind of tea. It's, it's very fuzzy, but it's just, you know, we're just brainstorming here with different ideas. And then I remember I saw white tiger in Japan that looked really sad. So I can write white tiger sad. And then I feel a bubbling up of ideas, a sad white tiger. Why would that tiger be sad? And then I just keep going and think, hmm, tiger tigers and lions. You know, maybe there's an owner, a, a pet tiger, a sad pet tiger, sad pet tiger. I'm still thinking of, hmm, why is that tiger sad? And so on and so forth. And I just keep filling the page. Stripes. Stripes are a big thing. Maybe it's that white tiger doesn't have stripes. Maybe there's a story there. So that's my way of doing idea maps and just, I keep exploring and asking myself why this, why that? And sometimes I come up with some bizarre stories, funny stories, stories that just don't work, but, but it's a great exercise for my book, SKO Stitches. I did a similar exercise where I was thinking about a girl with big feelings. And I had recently taught a class on SKO stitching, which is a Japanese embroidery method. And I thought, what if there was a girl named sko, which is not a, a normal or common Japanese girl's name or any name really, because the translation means little stabs. So you probably don't want suing your child. Little stabs. But I thought about what if this girl had all these big feelings to contend with, you know? And she learns that her namesake is about mending using stitches, and then she has this way of a creative outlet to express her emotions and heal them as mending is, you know, part of that whole process. And so

that's how my story idea came about. I also like to look at a lot of books, and I don't always look at other children's books, but design books like this one. And there's something that has nothing related with children's books that could trigger a memory or an idea. You know, I would think about Bluebird here or you know, oh, strawberries. I have a memory of picking strawberries in this field and feeling lost. And wouldn't it be fun to create a story about a little girl getting lost in a strawberry field or something like that. I also have a few Japanese books here. And you know, my cultural heritage is a huge part of all of my books. And when I was a little girl, I read lots of books in Japanese and I was inspired to create my own version in English with my style. Your own art can be a source of inspiration too. I kept an illustrated journal when my daughter was a baby for a couple years, and when I flipped through them again, the memories flood me. And I remember all the funny things she used to say. There is this image I painted where she says, I love dew, and I just loved how she mispronounced. I love you. And I thought that would make such a sweet story of all these mispronunciations. So things like that, all my loose sketches, the sketchbooks I filled over the years, I might draw a random character that then will spark a story. Inspiration is all around us in conversations, in your art and sketchbooks on walks. I like to keep my notes up because who knows when ideas strike, be open to all of it.

#### Day 5 - Research

- Once you've settled onto an idea, you want to make sure that it fits into the market. There are a number of ways to do this, and a couple things to keep in mind is what you're doing is A, you want to see what's out there, what's popular, what's selling, essentially, and then B, you want something that's different, a little unusual or fresh, but not too different. For example, some ways to do this is to go to bookstores or libraries, see what's on display. Normally, brick and mortar stores will only carry things that you know, have the biggest appeal. You can check online versions of that. So online booksellers. Another great resources is Publishers Weekly, where you're going to go on the trade side now, where you'll see who's getting the book deals, which publishers are acquiring, what kind of material you'll see both adult and children's. And obviously you'd want to focus on the children's book section. And you can also check out maybe some of your favorite authors and illustrators who are posting online on social media, what kind of books they're working on. And again, you want to make sure that you're seeing what is popular, but you're not wanting to copy, you're not wanting to replicate, you're wanting to find something that's uniquely yours that you can market, that you still know will fit into this bigger category. The same thing for literary agencies and literary agents. They often post, you know, what kind of books they're looking for or what the latest book deal is, or what was the New York Times bestseller that they pitched and you know, sold and things like that. And I'm always looking for that sweet spot. An example is with my ninja book, when I first pitched it, I made sure to research what were the other Ninja Girl books out there. And I was surprised to find that there were very, very few Ninja Girl books out there, particularly about hard work. So that was a lovely combination of knowing that Ninja Books are very popular, but there weren't very many Ninja Girl books. So I fine tuned my story and I was able to get that popular and different book idea, and eventually the book was published. I encourage you to keep an open mind about your ideas as you research. I.

#### Day 6 - Sketching thumbnails

- Let's write a story together, beginning with thumbnails. Thumbnails are very tiny, very rough, quick sketches of the entire story. Here are my actual thumbnails I created for my books, and this one is

for sashko stitches. And as you can see, it's very rough. I created the pages onto the sketchbook paper. I actually numbered the pages. You can see 1, 2, 3. And I didn't even fully number them. I just knew that I had to have 32 pages total. And you know, I also have these little lines that show where I thought text might go. And I also try to think about just the variety in terms of whether the image will go across the entire two pages, which is called a spread, or if it would have, you know, a single image on one side, on one page, and then another image on the opposing page. Yeah, you can see more of those little lines that are supposed to indicate the text. And it's basically stick figures. And even I can barely tell what I actually meant at the time. I actually create multiple thumbnail sketches until I feel like it's ready for the next step. And then here's a thumbnail sketch for board book. And since there aren't very many words, I actually wrote down the words here and then just, you know, thought about where the images could be placed. For this one, I put in a little bit more effort for the Chen, the ninja grandma, where I used my template sketched, and then typed up the text that I thought would go with the illustrations. I thought we could write a story about our sad white tiger. I have my printed template here and my trusty pen. Ultimately, I would need two of these sheets for a full 32 page book. But let's start with these eight spreads. This represents a spread. So two pages. This line represents the gutter. So the center of the book, and this is important in bookmaking, since the images should at least important parts of the illustrations should not get into the gutter, or else when it's printed, you'll lose part of the illustration. So you want to have at least about an inch. But in this thumbnail sketch, I just keep that in mind, but I don't worry about it as I'm sketching. So we have this sad white tiger and I think about what would capture the attention of the reader. Do I want to start with the tiger or do I want to set the mood or the environment? So I'm just going to experiment. Let's start with a, a jungle scene. So I'm just going to say something. You know, I don't have the exact words yet. I, as I said, I'm visually oriented, so I'm just going to think it's going to introduce the environment and it's going to have jungles, lots of trees, maybe some hanging, and it's very rough. You can see, I just want to get a sense. So this is our jungle, and maybe in this opening spread, there are little animals peeking out. Maybe we have a two can, maybe we have an alligator or crocodile. And then I start thinking, wait, would tigers and alligators be in the same place? I think so, maybe not, but that's okay. It's a picture book, so you can go wild. Okay, so I have my first bread where it's a full illustration spanning both pages. Then for variety, I think I'll have something on just the left page for the next one. So this will be page 1, 2, 3, 4. Maybe I bring in elements of the jungle, but then now I see the tiger partially peeking out, and then I'm introducing sad little tiger. Maybe give it a face. I don't know. You never see kind of the back part. I think tigers have skinny tails. Then I think there might be some more words about describing the tiger for the next page. Maybe the tiger is looking longingly at other tigers that have stripes. See, this is how rough we're talking with the thumbnails sketches. You can barely tell it's a tiger. Maybe it's a closeup of the tiger. Sad, sad. And it's saying something like, I wish I had stripes. Since I have this kind of full, very bold spread, maybe I want something that's smaller and more detailed here. I don't have a name for the tiger yet, so as I'm doodling away, I'll think about what, what name would I give it? Would I just call it the sad white tiger? And then this tiger is going to think about, you know, maybe different ways of getting stripes, maybe paint, or I have the thought of tattoo, but you know, maybe we don't wanna introduce tattoo into this when I can't really think of everything. I'll just kind of randomly put in shapes and think, okay, I'll come back to that later. And then let's get the sad white tiger to go on an adventure. Maybe looking, going to the hardware store. You know, this would probably say something like, the sad white tiger goes to the nearest hardware store. Maybe we get stripes. But then the tiger looks at itself in the mirror and goes, oh no, that's not what I want to look like. Oh, no

squiggly. And so I'll just kind of look at these thumbnail sketches and think, is this working? What do I think? And keep continuing this way until you've created your full story.

#### Day 7 - Manuscript development

- I am a visual person, so I like starting with the illustrations and then moving on to the story. But it's okay if you prefer to start with the story and then create the illustrations or however, a combination, it's a, it's kind of a symbiotic relationship. Let's focus on developing the manuscript, and I have a few examples to show you for board books. The manuscript tends to be quite short for my sumo opposites book. Along with my thumbnail sketches, I'd actually started the manuscript as well, so I broke it down into pages. And on my first page, I thought, since they're opposites up, down, so here, let me open it here. Up down would be a nice opening spread. And then I thought about, oh, it would be fun to add the Japanese and the pronunciation of the Japanese words. And so I just wrote down all of the opposite words I could think of, you know, awake asleep. And the final changed and the order changed. But I just got a list of opposite words that I thought would work as the beginning point for this manuscript. Similarly for the picture book, this one was the Bach on the Ninja Grandma. I referenced my thumbnails as I was writing out my very, very rough initial sketch. And again, I have these broken down on each page. And really for this rough manuscript, I was just writing out the words that felt like they fit with my preliminary thumbnail sketches. And then I did multiples. I just kept writing out. And you know, there were different parts that I like, including poems. So I had separate sheet for the poem that I would add at the end. For example, if I go up here, there's a little poem there, and I was thinking about what the poem would be for that last spread. And then a part of the manuscript consideration is also, I've noticed, or I've found, that publishers and editors tend to love back matter, as they call it, which is additional information. It's often very educational, informative, maybe hopefully entertaining as well. So I often included a did you know, section to my picture books with little factoids and tidbits and funny information. Let's begin the manuscript for our white tiger friend. I have my thumbnail sketches here and my sketchbook. There's something about the tactileness of writing down the words that I really like. So my rough manuscripts always start handwritten, but if you're a computer person or you like just typing it out onto your phone, that's great. Let's pretend this is going to be a 16 page book instead of the standard 32. And this is where I might start deviating from the thumbnail sketch where I think, you know, maybe I don't want to start with the jungle scene actually, and I want to introduce the tiger right away. So maybe I start with, you know, the white tiger, or I would say the a white tiger lived in the jungle. And then I would actually show the white tiger here, because I only have these eight spreads, so I want to make sure that I can include the story arc from beginning, something happens and then we end it. So a white tiger lived in the jungle, maybe it had no stripes. This made the tiger said, maybe I want this spread to have. So I'm kind of moving things around, and I do do this with my thumbnail sketches where I'll just shift things around. So it's kind of like this and this, all of this will change. So remember, it's just rough. I'm just putting down words. The tiger wished he looked like his other tiger friends or something like that. What can he do? And I also, as I'm writing this out, I'm thinking, what's the message of the story? You know, I have this white tiger. It's all kind of random at this moment, but the more I think about it, you know, this tiger is seeing other tigers with stripes. It wants to belong. So belonging is part of the theme and wanting to fit in. And then as I think about it, my thumbnail sketches sort of recede in the background, and I think, okay, wait a second. Wait a second. I want the tiger to try to fit in, but ultimately I want the tiger to accept itself as he is. So I think, okay, it would be fun if he tries all these methods to create stripes. He's thinking,

what can he do? It's a series of he paints the stripes, but then it dries and he can't move, so dries and can't move. And then he might sew or knit himself an outfit with stripes. And so he creates an outfit with stripes, but then it's too hot or something too hot, I think. What else can you do? What else can you do? Maybe you know, it's a picture book. Anything can happen. What if you go to the jungle shaman? So I'm just going to write jungle shaman here. And then there's a potion, which creates beautiful stripes, but then it disappears. Maybe there's some funny side effects for the painting and other explorations of adding stripes. I love the idea of it being full page spreads with lots of details. And so now my words are informing the images and I'm going back and forth and there's going to be a lot of scribbling and scratching out and arrows and all of that. I'm not going to worry so much about pages right now, but I know that after he explores, I want this thing to happen for that aha moment. So I'll have, you know, aha, somewhere. Let's ignore the pages for now. And then I think, oh, wouldn't it be cool if the tiger happens upon this placid, beautiful lake and he sees a reflection of himself, and then, oh, maybe there's the dappling of leaves that adds patterns to his reflection. And then the leaves disappear, and then it's a sunset and adds a different color to him. And then he sees how he's almost like a canvas and can express himself in so many different ways. And then maybe there's a scene where everything recedes and he just looks beautiful in the reflection as he is. And so I want to try to capture that in my little original, in my rough manuscript. And so I'll add reflection and you know, dappling leave shadows sunset. It's that final scene of seeing himself just exactly the way he is, and that's awesome. Maybe exactly as he is. And maybe there's no words for this last spread. It's just reflection between my thumbnails and my rough manuscript. I have a lot to play with, and the next step for me is to develop the characters more fully, in this case, mainly the tiger. The most important part though, is to just really have fun and play and enjoy and let your imagination run wild.

#### Day 8 - Character development

- Once I have a workable story, ideas for characters bubble up and it's time for character development, I'd like to show you some examples. Rough sketches that I created for some of my books for my sumo board book. I wanted to continue with that spirit of play and thought let's, let's just use some paints and come up with what my sumo guys would look like. And so you can see, I know I wanted the sumo babies to look pretty round and cute and the hairstyle I was refining and I was thinking about, you know, different face shapes. I mean they're all round, but with ears, without ears and things like that. I do also love to just sketch with ink and this one was for my grandma ninja and you know, I thought, oh, she needs to have a huge bun. And then I thought about, oh, it would be fun to have throughout the book the hair accessories change. You can see there she has a heart and a little y and she has knitting needles and, and then I thought about just different positions and I didn't do that with these sumo guys here, but I did continue to draw out different outfits with the summers kimonos and things like that and, and thought about them in different situations as well. I'm going to use pen and paper to develop my tiger story characters. I'm looking at my rough manuscript and my thumbnail sketches. Well the main guy is the tiger. Let me just draw a tiger. And that's pretty cute. And this is when I start thinking about style. Do I want it to be more realistic looking? Do I want it to be very stylized and I extra cutesy or, I mean, I obviously have my own natural style, but there's variations and I need to make sure that it still looks like a tiger without the stripes, which might be a little tricky. So I need to think about what is it that's a distinguishing characteristic about tigers. Their snouts are bigger than your average cat. Do I want dots for eyes? No, I like it. A little more shaped. That's looking more like a bear. I feel like it's that little

feathery bits around its jaws and around the face. And so I'll just continue playing with it. Like different angles of the tiger. Do I want it to be more human-like where it stands? That's another option. Oh no, that's looking very much like a bear. We don't want bears. And so I'll keep just sketching out different ideas until I feel like am going in a certain direction. We're not aiming for finalized characters here. Oh, I'm liking that. Bigger eyes. I, but I think I want it to look like a little, little, almost a cub. So how would I do that? Make it bigger face maybe? Oh, it's no, now again, it keeps looking like a bear. I think it has to have a slightly narrow face. Oh, okay. That's better. That's better. Yeah. So I think I'm going to go with something like that 'cause it is a bit sad, slightly sad. And tigers have those little dots right there. Okay. That's my little cute tiger. And then you know the, there would have to be other tigers with the stripes, so I'll figure those out. Maybe he has a best friend. Maybe that two can can be the shaman. I don't know. With necklace, maybe a little medicine pouch. Think about all of the characters in this story. For example, is there a person or another animal at the hardware store? Who are the friends? What about the family members? Include the background characters as well. Think of every entity your main character will interact with.

#### Day 9 - Rough storyboard

- Picture book dummy. Might sound like a strange term, but essentially it means a picture book mockup. And this will be what you'll be submitting to publishers and or agents. The picture book dummy, in my experience, which I also call a storyboard, the final version is a larger version of the thumbnails. So you get enough detail, but it's small enough so it doesn't create this huge file. And it gives a wonderful sense of the overall story, includes the illustrations and the text. It's not super detailed. It may not even be in color. Often it's black and white. You can do it in color if you'd like. There will be some components where it will have to be fleshed out, but it's a very small portion. So it's something to give publishers and agents a sense of what this story will be like visually and texturally based on our working manuscript and thumbnail sketches. Let's create a rough storyboard spread, and I'm going to use procreate for variety's sake. I have a storyboard template here that is going to be included as part of the class, my apple pencil. And let me choose one of the spreads. Let's choose this one with the The crying tiger. And I have a layer here for painting. Let me start with an outline. I'll do a little sketch. So remember, this is the gutter. I don't want important information to fall in this range here. So let me make the tiger a little bit over here. Then maybe I'll have the tail here. And as I said, this rough storyboard can just be black and white. So I'm going to make, let's see, I'm going to use my brush, which I created for the procreate watercolor class that you can find in creative bug. So at this stage, I just want to block out shapes and get composition ideas. I'll just make the face separate layer, give the tiger some eyelashes, lashes, then make this lighter. Maybe add just a little bit. I wanna go darker. I will add some tears too. And then on a separate layer, I'll just write the text. I could type it, but procreate text is sometimes unwieldy. I want to say white tiger is sad. And so that would be my opening spread of the story. And then I could either create another spread separately, or I could just make this a layer and say, you know, page one and two, and then create my next spread based on my thumbnail, sketches and manuscript. And during this phase, I may make changes too. What's great about procreate is that I can move things around, change the sizes, change colors, even if I wanted to without having to redraw and restart every single time. Although I like the tiger on the left here, I want to see what would happen if I flip a root, these guys. So it's now on the right. Let's take our text, maybe bring it here. I could make it bigger. And remember, I don't want anything important near the gutter. That might be too big. So I wanna keep that there, maybe bring it up a little bit this way, and then just expand that

more, you know, and just play around with composition until I guess to point that feels good. Yeah, I like it in the upper left there. That's nice. And then continue this for each thumbnail, transferring it to a larger spread. This particular spread is about six inches wide and three inches high. There isn't a real standard. You could even make it, you know what would be a typical storybook, but I like the smaller size because it doesn't feel overwhelming. And there's more control for me, and I can add more details if I wanted to. Again, this will change down the line, but I want it to get to a place where I'm happy to share it. Continue on with this for each spread. And then in the end, I'll compile them together for the picture book dummy or storyboard, as I call it.

#### Day 10 - Getting feedback

- Feedback is such an important part of the process, and it can be vulnerable too. So the who is very important. We want to make sure we're asking for feedback from someone. Maybe a creative friend. It could be someone, a picture book group that you're part of, or something that you find online. A similar type of critique group. Even better are kids since that's your target audience. Some examples of feedback that I found beneficial are when things are unclear. That's very helpful to me when they want extra things included. Maybe a funny character, an element that I didn't consider, like the character getting lost that resonates with me. Speaking of resonating, you don't have to accept every feedback or criticism. Take that as information and if it resonates with you, you want to make the changes, but ultimately it's your story. The feedback we're looking for here isn't from professionals, but from your peers or even your target audience, which are kids. And the information you receive will help you prepare your dummy or storyboard like I call it for pitching.

#### Day 11 - Formatting and editing

- Incorporating the feedback. We're ready to edit and refine the dummy. Here's the spread we've been working on. And I shared it with a friend who thought maybe the white tiger looked kind of plain, so I added some more greenery and also just color. And I think that white tiger is sad is fine, but maybe it adds a little bit more oomph with a word like, feels white tiger feels sad. Let's edit that. So this makes it easy to edit and procreate, and this is looking kind of big. Keep in mind, this is just a mockup. The dimensions of this spread is much smaller than an actual picture book, so the text would also be a lot smaller. But I wanted to have that sense of, you know, where the text will be. So I'm liking that. Let's look at another example from my book, SKO Stitches. Here's my dummy Preedit editing. And I got feedback that going from this page to suddenly the woods and then to her room seemed a little jarring. So I made some edits and you can see that we went from that same, the heart is in a tangle to SKO crying in her room, and she's still in her room in that next thread, which then ultimately in my book, became a much more impactful rendition of the tangle in her heart. And then we consolidated so that it was just a page of her in a room. I really liked the feedback that I got. I did feel like I needed a, a stronger impact with the emotional aspect of the tangles in her heart. And having two pages, or actually three, if you consider the spread for her in the room crying, seemed a little excessive. So I was happy with these edits and changes. Let's look at one more example this time from my board books, Sumo Colors. Here is my pre edited storyboard slash dummy, and this book is all about colors. And here you can see that this is my spread for red. But in the actual book, after editing, I added a whole lot more components. I wanted a temple. I wanted, you know, fall foliage, which Japan is very famous for. I added lots of lanterns and just more details to make it red. The red color very dominant. And other edits that happen were things like, I originally had gold and silver as an option, but we figured out that gold and silver would be a little

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hard to incorporate into the spread. It's, it's a little more expensive actually, to add foiling, so we decided to eliminate that and did black instead. And again, I was happy with these suggestions. Editing always makes your work stronger.

#### Day 12 - Submission package

- Depending on who you're submitting to, the requirements may be different. Here are some of the things I was required to submit when I was submitting for Sumo counting. This is what I included in the submission. I had my dummy. This one was a pretty casual one. I created a PDF by compiling my individual spreads, and if you work traditionally, you'll need to scan your spreads and compile 'em into one document. As you can see, I split it up. I, these little lines represented. I had a vision of including the Japanese, but I kept it simple and publishers and agents loved the back matter that I mentioned before, which is educational or entertaining, interesting information that's added at the end of the book. So I had sumo tidbits and fun facts and thought it would be great to include a glossary of Japanese terms. I also include a separate final manuscript that broke it down by page. I started on page two because page one is usually considered either the cover or that first page after the cover. And then I just kept the format very clean and simple. There's the examples of the history and glossary terms. I also have a little bit of an elevator pitch, so a synopsis of what the entire book is about. And I was required to include a full size full color spread. In this case, I just chose the first couple pages. I was thinking originally that it would just be one on each, but I wanted to give them a sense. So you can see that this will show what style I envision the book to be in, maybe the color schemes I might want to use, and also the composition that I have in mind. It's fun to compare. This was my full color spread that I submitted. We added background color, and it stayed pretty true to the original illustration I created. But there's this slight differences in color that this is called a moi, and the MOI is red there, so that's a lot of fun. Another interesting thing that happened with this submission was I submitted it as a picture book, but ultimately they thought a board book made more sense. So we reformatted and reconfigured and shortened the pages so that it would be a board book. And this was the first one of what ended up being a series of four sumo books. I'm showing everything here as printouts, but nowadays everything is emailed or done online. So make sure all the elements are digitized and compiled into an easy to deliver format. Some other things I've been asked for are comp titles, so about two to three book titles that are in the same genre or similar topics, or maybe it has a a vibe that's similar. And an important thing to note about them is they should be, I wouldn't say bestselling, but at least well selling books that you want to include as part of your package. You also wanna show evidence of your online presence, so that could include social media platforms, your portfolio, even your CV or resume. If it includes any sort of background in publishing or design or illustration. Don't be too concerned about not having a picture book making background with a great story. And all of these materials assembled, you'll boost your chances of being noticed by a publisher or agent.

#### Day 13 - Pitching your book

- Are you ready to start pitching? It's so exciting. And what is that anyway, pitching. Pitching is basically selling and putting your story idea in the best light possible. You can pitch directly to publishers or you can pitch to agents. An agent will shop your book idea to various publishers and will be taking commission. Standard commission is about 15%, whereas if you pitch directly to publishers, then the take home is all yours. But then you are doing all of the negotiating and agents are very well versed in all the ins and outs of the details and rights, and even things like how many

free copies you'll get of the book once you sign the contract. Having an agent means that you are watching a long-term career. As an author illustrator combination, I've had experience with both. I've pitched for many years directly to publishers, and I love my agent who takes care of the parts that aren't, I'm not so great at like negotiating and talking about contracts. And even when problems arise, the agent will actually be the one who communicates between the publisher and the author illustrator. I'm lucky enough to be both the author and illustrator of my books, but for most people there will be a separation between the illustrator and the author, and the publisher often determines how to pair the two. This doesn't mean that if you have a best friend who's an illustrator and you are the author that you can't submit together, it's just that most likely the publisher will be the determining factor. Make sure to research publishers and agents, they tend to have categories or genres that they specialize in. So for example, my agent is specializing in author illustrators, so we were a great match and her aesthetics also matched mine. So look for that when you are looking for different agencies and agents. And same thing with the publishers. Some publishers tend to focus on, you know, maybe more educational or maybe spiritual books, or maybe they like to do really beautiful, heavily involved more almost coffee table art book type things. Research is important and once you have somewhere you want to submit, gather all of the submission elements we've been working on. Attach it to a cover query email. Include your personal information, a synopsis of the book. Make it catchy and short and concise because these are busy people. And remember, you are selling, you really want to give it the best foot forward. A little tip is to keep a spreadsheet with the people you've submitted to with the date, and this will help you track and then follow up. Chances are you won't hear from them for at least several weeks if ever. But don't be discouraged and keep trying. If you'd like to go a different route. There's always self-publishing.

#### Day 14 - Post pitch

- Let's say you get the exciting news that your book has been acquired. Now, what some of the things I wasn't aware of was that my book changed in different ways, and I also didn't know that my cover and the title would be largely determined by the publisher. Of course, there, it's a collaboration, so there's back and forth, but there are big sales meetings, and so everything changed in that department. Other things that will happen is that the editing process will go through many, many rounds, and for illustrations, illustrators typically work with the art director, so depending on the publisher, you may start with the editor and then get handed off to the art director, or you may work in conjunction with both the editor and the art director. One thing you can be sure of is that your original dummy will evolve and evolve and evolve. Bookmaking is a long game of lots of trial and error and pitching your book is a great way to start. If you're a writer, you can pitch a book. If you're an illustrator, you can pitch a book, and if you're both, you can certainly pitch a book. I pitched my very first book 10 years ago, and now I'm working on my 12th. I love it. I love it. I love it. I love it.

#### Day 15 - Storytime

- The adventure of the white tiger is to be continued. I'd like to end our time with one of my stories, SKO Stitches. I had fun creating the end papers. SKO has so many feelings, feelings of many shapes and sizes. Sometimes they feel like big, heavy clouds weighing her down into the ground. Sometimes they feel like tiny cacti sending prickles up and down her skin. Sometimes they feel like long winding cracks traveling all over her body. Most of the time they feel like a tangled ball of string knotted in her tummy and wrapped around her heart. One day, SESCO's mother finds her

crying in her room, mama wraps the weepy girl in her strong warm arms and asks, do you remember where your name comes from? SKO snuffles. Something about a fisherman. Well, yes, her mother agrees, but it started with a fisherman's clothes. She begins many, many hundreds of years ago in Japan, fishermen went out to sea every day to catch as many fish as they could to feed their families. After a while, all the wind and water and fish scales would tear and damage their clothes. Fabric was very precious, so the fisherman's family would mend the clothes by hand. They made tiny little stitches to fix the tears. As the clothes were mended over and over, the stitches started to look like beautiful designs. The mens made up designs on purpose and called the stitches sko. It was not only a way to fix the clothes, but a way to make them lovely too. Here, let me show you. SESCO's mother takes a needle, a bit of thread and a small piece of cloth, not the end of the thread. Poke the needle through the fabric. One stitch, two stitches, three stitches. This ska design is called S Aha. It means ocean waves as aha looks like star shaped blooms. This one is treasures. There are so many designs and you can stitch anything you want. Sashko carefully picks up the needle threads. It knots the end of the thread and slowly pulls it through a piece of fabric. One stitch, two stitches, three stitches and more. She stitches a simple cloud shape and feels the dark cloud around her lighten. A little s goes stitches every day on little fabric pieces. She stitches tiny cacti, and the prickles in her body feel less sharp. She stitches her small and big fears, and they start to feel less scary. She's so much bigger than the tiny stitches after all, and shape making is relaxing. She stitches her favorite things. She pays attention to the details, which makes her love them more. She stitches her sadness into waves and her dreams. Inside treasure chest, she stitches stories that bloom like a garden. Then she finds the biggest piece of fabric in the house, and she stitches a huge heart. Within a heart. Within a heart. And oh, SKO has an idea. She begins to stitch the fabric pieces together into one big, beautiful patchwork. She notices the long winding lines that look like cracks held together with tiny stitches, she stitches and stitches and stitches with every stitch that tangles in her tummy and around her heart loosen and lessen. She completes it. She sees all of her many size feelings and fears laid out side by side, up and down. Seeing them all together makes her feel braver and stronger than even her scariest fears. She wraps herself in her ska quilt and smiles, a quiet smile. She snuggles deeper into her quilt. It feels so cozy like being held in her mama's strong, warm arms. What shall I stitch tomorrow? SKO wonders. There are holes in her comfy pants and a small rip in her toy kitty. There are images in her mind and feelings in her heart, ready to show up as tiny little stitches. She has so many things that need mending, things that need the love and care of sko. She'll make them even lovelier even stronger one stitch at a time, and that is the end. I include information at the back about SESCO's origins and some common patterns and how SKO fabric is as well. So some fun information back there. Creating books from my imagination to reality is such a beautiful, magical experience, and I wish that for you as well. I.