

# THE WINGED BEAR

An exploration of anthropomorphic and  
autoethnographic-inspired visual storytelling and  
its impact on the design of a children's picture book

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# Abstract

This research considers the ways in which autoethnographic and anthropomorphic storytelling informs the design of a children's picture book for young readers. This practice-led research asks, "How might visual storytelling explore anthropomorphism as a means to inform the design of an illustrated picture book that seeks to enrich the imagination, empowering young readers to envision a hopeful future?" Drawing on discourses by authors who explore anthropomorphism in narrative texts, as well as fairy tales and fantasy, and contextual practitioners and picture-book designers, the study focuses on designing a picture book that offers the audience a narrative world that elevates hope and imagination. Methodologically, the research design underpinning the study is shaped by a practice-led inquiry emanating from an artistic research paradigm. The study contributes to knowledge about the potential of stories sourced from the self, paired with anthropomorphism and other literary devices, such as allegory and metaphor, to generate visual narratives articulated through illustration and text to resonate with the reader and express transformative emotions.

# Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly quoted) nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been submitted for the award of any other paper or other institution of higher learning.

Braidie Lin Patience  
17 May, 2023

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17 May, 2023

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# Introduction

This practice-led research is conceived as an illustrated narrative design project, utilising anthropomorphism as a storytelling strategy to convey a compelling visual story. The research question that this study asks is:

“How might visual storytelling explore anthropomorphism as a means to inform the design of an illustrated picture book that seeks to enrich the imagination, empowering young readers to envision a hopeful future?”

## Rationale and Significance

The picture book, *The Winged Bear*, which forms the practice at the centre of this study, explores the symbiosis of word-writing and picture-making, evidenced through the practice of visual storytelling. The illustrated narrative is set in an inherently anthropomorphic world with a character that draws elements from the researcher’s past experiences. The natural environment comprises living and breathing entities, such as the sky, the stars and the wind, with human-like attributes. These elements have been brought to life, where they have become secondary characters interwoven into the story, reacting and responding to the bear throughout the narrative.

The rationale underpinning this study considers the ways in which autoethnographic and anthropomorphic storytelling informs the design of a children’s picture book for young readers.

The significance of the project is demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, it is exhibited through the creation of an original children’s narrative inspired by stories of the self, paired with anthropomorphism and other literary devices, such as allegory and metaphor. This approach to storytelling aims to enrich the imagination as it presents the concept of an imaginary world veiled within our own, accessible to anyone who has the mind to discover it.

Secondly, the project contributes to the research that is led by creative processes, developing a methodological approach to picture-book making and illustration. Therefore, the study expands on and adds to the artistic knowledge surrounding the elements to be considered in picture-book making and the role of the maker of such a book.

## Significant Terms Used in the Study

The nature of this thesis resides in the realm of artistic inquiry; as such, contextual definitions may differ concerning the way in which the study is situated. Therefore, it is helpful to consider and define three significant terms and the meaning of each to this project.

### *Visual Storytelling through Picture Books*

The picture book is a visual storytelling device. It is an amalgamation of words and images, encompassing a coalescence of concept, illustration, design and production.

Picture books have a long and rich history, and, through the years, they have evolved into the unique, dynamic and contemporary art forms found on bookshelves today. The picture book has seen growth and development as an emerging art form in response to the digital threat of the picture book 'app'. The traditional picture book and the children's publishing industry have been reinvigorated. With the emergence of screens in our modern world, the physical picture book has needed to be crafted and seen as a beautiful object, as a form of art in and of itself, to compete with the technology that has become so prevalent in our lives. Therefore, the demand for improved production quality, as well as improved design, for picture books has increased, as the overall tactile and aesthetic experience of the book is now being considered alongside the content. The concept of producing and publishing more artistically contemporary books is credited mainly to the rise of the small independent publishers that have grown rapidly over the last decade, prompting larger publishing companies to follow suit (Salisbury & Styles, 2012).

### *Picture-book Designer*

The role of the picture-book designer involves an interplay of sorts: the process of thinking and communicating through words and pictures. Otherwise known as *the maker*, the designer operates in a multidisciplinary field, which involves a varying combination of the roles of author, writer, artist, illustrator, researcher and producer. It is an art cultivated through the interdependent skills of observation, imagination and drawing (Salisbury & Styles, 2012).

### *Illustration*

The need to clarify and define the word 'illustration' stems from its seemingly changing role and status over the years. The notion of the illustrator's role as a creator of an art form has been known to drift in and out of fashion; therefore, it is helpful to consider and define illustration within the context of this project. It is a practice rooted in drawing and narrative. Illustration is the role of visualising the written word in a way that fills the gaps in the story, expanding on rather than repeating the text and rendering it as a unified whole. The pencil in the hand of an illustrator can bridge the gap between imagination and an emergent image.

## The Nature of the Project

*The Winged Bear* is a practice-led design project encapsulated in the form of a picture book. The project investigates the ways in which anthropomorphism and autoethnographic feedback may help the design of a picture book. Its intended audience is young readers, aged seven to nine years old.

A comprehensive understanding of the primary audience, children aged seven to nine, is pivotal to the success of this research. The intended readership forms the cornerstone of this study, and comprehending their nuanced tastes in visual storytelling holds the utmost significance.

To achieve this understanding, the researcher delved into the preferences and expectations of children within the age group of seven to nine. These young readers typically exhibit specific preferences in visual storytelling. Their cognitive development, evolving comprehension abilities, and emerging visual literacy skills shape their reception of illustrated narratives. For instance, they tend to favour narratives featuring relatable characters and situations, along with vibrant and engaging visuals. Additionally, interactive elements and engaging storytelling techniques, such as the use of suspense and humour, often resonate with this age group. By exploring and understanding these preferences, the research ensures that the narrative effectively engages its primary audience. This research approach aligns with the core objectives of the study, enhancing its contextual foundation and ability to resonate with young readers aged seven to nine.

## The Structure of the Exegesis

To establish a sense of the development of this project, the exegesis has been divided into five chapters: an introduction; the contextual review of knowledge; the research design; the critical commentary; and a conclusion. The first chapter delves into the key terms of the study and the researcher's positioning, articulating and situating the designer within their field of practice and the influence of that positioning on the design outcome. The second chapter considers the historical developments and recent research into the impact of anthropomorphism in children's literature, including fairy tales, fantasy literature and visual storytelling. Also, it examines the contextual practitioners and their influence on the project. The third chapter discusses the journey of practice, outlining and discussing the research design, which consists of the methodologies and methods employed throughout the design process. The fourth chapter includes a critical commentary on the design outcome at the project's core. The final chapter presents the conclusion of the research, reflects on the design journey and considers its contribution to knowledge.

Having provided an introduction to the thesis, it is now helpful to consider the researcher's positioning concerning their field of practice and its influence on the trajectory of the design outcome.



# 1

## Introduction

Each designer or artist using creative practice as a form of inquiry in their research is commonly expected to identify and articulate their position and its influence on their research outcome. Holmes (2020) defines positioning as “an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (2020, p. 1). Lincoln and Guba (1994) argue that positionality is at the core of the design process. This stems from the view that knowledge is considered situated (embodied) and the designer is called upon to take responsibility for their positioning. This chapter aims to identify the researcher’s ontological and epistemological contexts and values, shaped by experiences in social and political contexts, their biases and their influences on the design process.

## Prior Practice

As a child, drawing, painting, writing poems, and making up songs and stories were my sanctuary. I was raised in a tumultuous and chaotic environment saturated with gang culture, domestic abuse, violence, drug addiction and drunken revelries; as a result, storytelling provided me with an outlet and an escape. Through the practice of writing and drawing, I found a temporary safe place to rest within the imaginary worlds I had crafted with pen and paper. I observed cautionary tales in the lives around me, and over time, I have found my artistic expression becoming increasingly interwoven with storytelling. When I think back to my childhood and its influence on my work and the direction in which my creative practice is heading, I realise that I have been walking down this narrative path for some time.



**FIGURE 1**

*Me on a school field trip to Auckland Zoo around 2001 - 2002. I was around seven or eight years old. This photograph captures a childhood memory combining my early love for animals with my passion for drawing. This is my first observational drawing excursion and remains one of my fondest childhood memories.*

## Current Context

Drawing from an innate curiosity about the natural world, with a particular interest in the animal kingdom and astronomy, my creative practice focuses on visual storytelling, where written narrative and illustration converge in the form of children's picture books. My enthusiasm for storytelling stems from a longing to capture a sense of adventure through the lens of childlike wonder. Through this lens, I strive to stoke the fires of imagination to rekindle the simple joy and youthful exuberance children access so effortlessly; this innocence and way of seeing the world is often left behind when entering adulthood. Rather than searching for and endorsing a magical adventure usually found in children's tales, I aim for the stories I create to be more fantastical, uplifting the imagination and encouraging the audience to view the world differently. My aim is that the audience will look at the world through the 'glittering eyes' of childlike wonder, where the awe-inspiring can be found amongst the everyday and accessible to anyone who has the mind to see it. As Roald Dahl (2017, p. 62) once said, "and above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places".

Recurring themes that permeate my creative practice consist of an endearing nod to childlike wonder mixed with the playful celebration of adventure, often involving symbolism in the form of crossroads and pathways where the protagonist must discover the road that they want to traverse. My work often portrays whimsical midnight escapades, paired with a reverence for night-sky imagery. It is a time when the world is seemingly quiet and still, and where I feel most creative; the stillness of the hour gives me the sense that anything is possible.

The importance of story in my work reflects the years of dabbling and searching for a creative expression that encompasses more than just detached, beautiful imagery. It was when I unsuccessfully pursued a degree in fine art that I realised the medium for which I had been searching all this time was illustration. Upon this discovery, the possibilities of my artistic drawing began to expand, and I decided to focus on crafting meaningful stories and bringing to life imaginative narratives, rich in illustration. The story of *The Winged Bear* developed throughout this thesis manifests these discoveries. It embodies the joy I have learned to embrace in coping with the confusion, pain and loneliness I experienced in childhood. The story subtly alludes to the peace and hope I found through my Christian faith as a young adult. This is explored through literary devices such as allegory, metaphor and anthropomorphism. Through illustration, I came to recognise the potential of anthropomorphism. This type of storytelling has the unique ability to offer the widest variety for diverse characters. As such, characters can transcend gender, age and nationality. Because of this, the audience is prompted by their own ideas and preconceptions of the animals, environment and actions. Therefore, a chubby winged bear has the potential to inspire a range of emotions, depending on the viewer. What each member of the audience sees is unique because their experience is informed by their own imagination and the connections they forge.



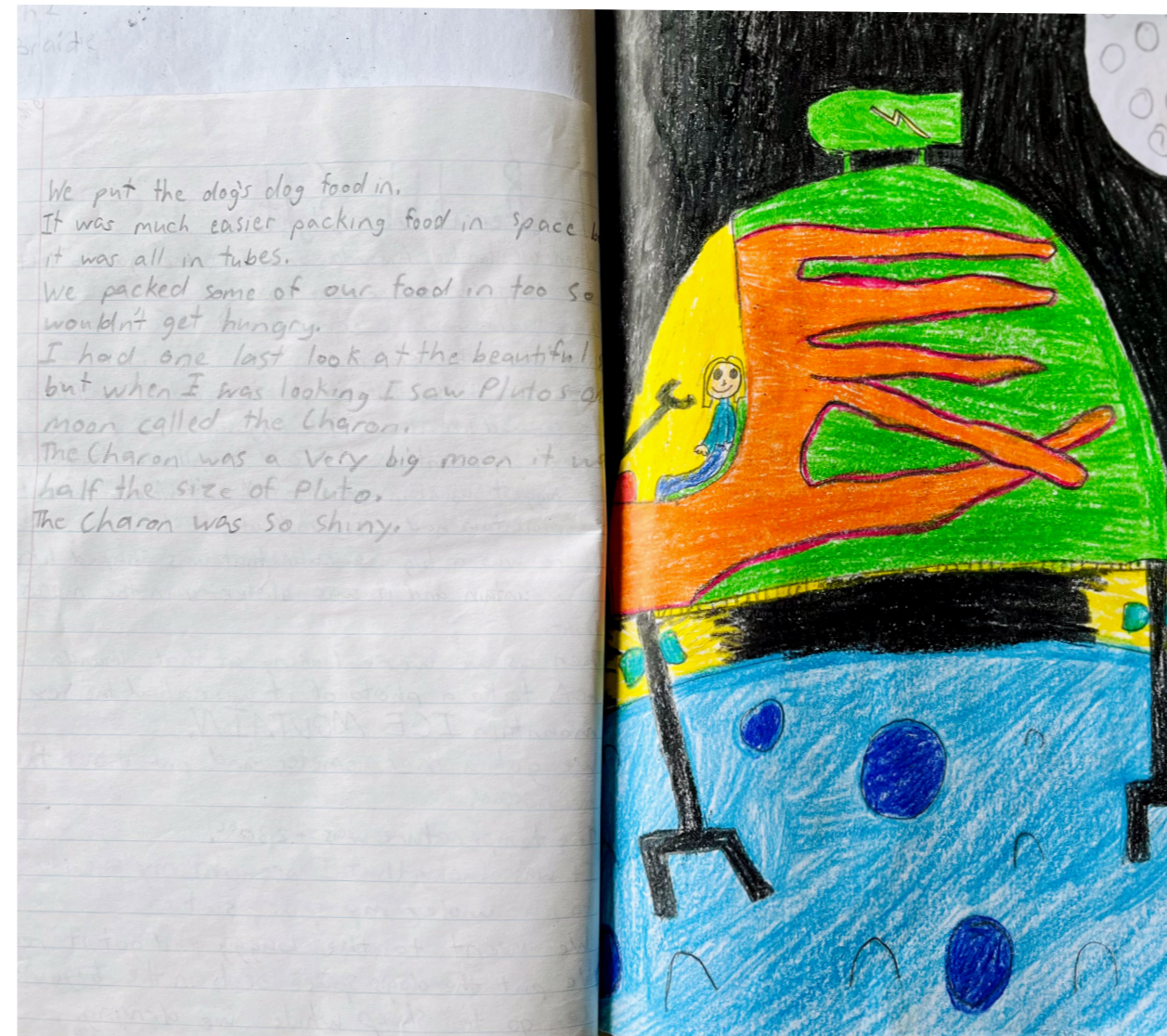
**FIGURE 2**

*Leopard drawing inspired by the Auckland Zoo field trip, drawn around 2001 -2002. This early drawing showcases my curiosity and innate draw towards depicting the natural world through art.*



**FIGURE 3**

*The magnificent sight picture-book cover. It was created around 2001 – 2002. As a child, I often wrote and made my own picture-books; this was made around the age of seven or eight and conveys my early interest in telling stories about the stars.*



**FIGURE 4**

*The magnificent sight picture book, inside spread.*

## Purpose of the Thesis

With hope being a significant theme in my practice, this thesis aims to create and illustrate a resonant story that inspires and enriches the imagination. Through acknowledging and recognising my Māori (Tainui, Ngāti Māhanga), Pasifika, Scottish and European heritages, and their combined generational legacy and influence, I am aware of and mindful of the lasting impact a well-crafted narrative can leave behind. Because I come from a multicultural background and was raised in a broken home, the search for a sense of belonging is a central concept and theme I have pursued and discovered in the stories I consume and produce. Aulani Wilhelm (2014, nd) poses this question during her talk at Stanford University: “What kind of ancestors do we want to be together to make society better?” This statement succinctly articulates this idea of intergenerational thinking and lasting impact; it resonates and best situates the intention behind my creative practice.

With the researcher’s position now established, the next chapter of the thesis will discuss the review of contextual knowledge that informs the research.



# 2

## Overview

In Design Research, issues that originate in our mundane world and everyday lives cannot be confined to a specific disciplinary field. Instead, such research engages with multiple disciplines, theories, frameworks and literature. The creative practice employs a methodological research approach that is an inductive process where theoretical frameworks and theories are extrapolated from individual outcomes; therefore, applying fundamental principles is not possible as it is governed by various influences (Buchanan, 2001).

This practice-led project draws from the researcher's own experiences and is influenced by the contextual universe to which it belongs. This chapter aims to present the main components of the contextual knowledge that has influenced the research. It is divided into five topics: Overview, Through the Lens of Anthropomorphic Storytelling, Fairy Tale and Fantasy, Picture Books and Visual Storytelling, and Contextual Practitioners and Picture-book Designers.

### *The Picture Book as a Storytelling Device*

In an increasingly visual world where, since the digital age began, our culture has been becoming more and more image-based, the picture book remains one of the first forms of storytelling media we encounter. With a combination of sequential imagery and written narrative, picture books contribute to understanding and making sense of the reality around us, helping us understand our place in the world (Hellige & Klanten, 2012).

This practice-led research is conceived as an illustrated narrative design project, utilising anthropomorphism as a storytelling strategy to convey a compelling visual story. At the outset, anthropomorphism is considered to be “the process of assigning human traits to non-human entities” (Gray, 2019, p. 1) and has been known for its long and active presence in children's literature. An understanding of an effective and ineffective approach must first be established; this will ensure that the term is defined and will provide a context for communicating the narrative through anthropomorphism. The literature relating to the history and development of anthropomorphism in visual storytelling has been analysed in this chapter to provide further understanding. Other sources of narrative inspiration involve research into fairy tales and fantasy, adding depth and world-building to the creative process.

It was necessary to discover a way to manifest the research in an original visual story and this was achieved by creatively synthesising the data into an illustrated picture book. A focus on and consideration of the components that make up a picture book will be examined alongside the research, combining word-writing and picture-creation to discover relationships between words and pictures. This project aims to produce a visual narrative, relating a resonant story about a bear who dreams of growing wings and soaring with the stars. It also aims to convey, subtly, the importance of an enduring spirit through the protagonist's journey.

## 2:1 Through the Lens of Anthropomorphic Storytelling

### A Brief History

From as early as the mid-1600s, picture books created for children began to appear in British and European traditions, with one of the earliest known books displaying animals, titled *Orbis sensualium pictus*, dating back to 1659 (Figure 5) (Gray, 2019). The book employed animals as a reference to teach children the alphabet, encouraging them to mimic animal noises to help them sound out words (Shaw, 2015).

It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that fictional children's stories were seen as a form of education and amusement. A social re-evaluation of child development concerning what it meant to be a child emerged with the formation of the middle class. During this time frame, children, previously viewed as small adults, were now seen as requiring more time to grow and develop before they were expected to become adults and assume adult responsibilities (Dunn, 2011). These developments brought new opportunities for picture books, where educational psychology supported children's literature to serve as educational content, teaching life lessons and morality, and including animals as lead characters (Gray, 2019).

### Effective and Ineffective Approaches to Anthropomorphic Storytelling

Paul Wells (2009), in his critical study concerning the representation of anthropomorphism in an animated context, discusses the role in which animality has been constructed within this medium to date. He argues that (p. 3):

I see animated characters in the first instance as phenomena and, consequently, able to carry a diversity of representational positions. At one and the same time, such characters can be beasts and humans, or neither; can prompt issues about gender, race and ethnicity, generation, and identity, or not; and can operate innocently or subversively, or as something else entirely.

This statement may serve in this research as a basis for the notion that anthropomorphism in visual storytelling can play a role in bridging divisions within society. It also helps to provide a deeper understanding of individual experiences by employing the anthropomorphic lens of animal representation. Wells' observations of animated animal narratives suggest that an inner logic informing the anthropomorphic intentions and viewpoints of the characters is needed to achieve a sense of credibility. These portrayals will likely fail without coherent inner logic and understanding of established "true animal actions, behaviour, and primal motivation" (Wells, 2009, p. 22). Although the discussion within this text relates to anthropomorphic storytelling in the animation industry, it provides insight within a narrative framework. Therefore, this knowledge can be relevant to a book's written and illustrated format, as it, ultimately, includes visual expressions of storytelling.



FIGURE 5

Gray, 2019. *Orbis sensualium pictus*.

Markowsky (1975, p. 460) describes three categories in animal stories: “stories that tell of animals that dress and act like people, as *The Wind in the Willows*; stories in which animals talk, but act otherwise naturally, as *Bambi*; and stories in which animals are objectively described”. The third example is not considered to be anthropomorphic storytelling and is aimed at allowing young readers to identify with the animals, as they may not be familiar to the children. The second approach, which includes talking animals, provides a sense of imagination and fantasy, offering entry into another world that may otherwise be unavailable. The second approach is adopted for this project, as the creatures featured in the story are talking beasts. Apart from that, they remain similar to their natural animal counterparts. Typically, children prefer animal stories, possibly because they find animals to be more interesting than are humans. Another explanation may be that they find it easier to relate to animal characters who exhibit admirable traits, such as courage, kindness, and the ability to overcome trials and triumph over their enemies.

The beauty of anthropomorphic storytelling is its ability to portray complex topics from the comfortable emotional distance animal characters provide. It addresses challenging subjects like bullying, death, race, societal and cultural differences, and choosing to do the right thing (Dunn, 2011). Expanding on the concept of conveying moral and ethical themes through animal characters, Jennifer Armstrong (2010, p. 40) argues that:

Doing the right thing is often inconvenient, painful, scary, or socially awkward, and it usually means giving up something that you really don't want to give up, or doing something that you'd really rather not do. But look at the animals looking back at you from the pages of the books we love, and ask yourself if you can follow the standards they uphold.

The anthropomorphic lens of storytelling offers the visual narrative freedom to transcend the limitations of portraying human characters. It allows the audience to connect with the characters using their own experiences and connections to inform the story. Consequently, the protagonist in *The Winged Bear* has the potential to evoke an array of emotions and traits that engages the viewer and identifies with the character and visuals.

## 2:2 Fairy Tale and Fantasy

This design project combines strategies borrowed from anthropomorphism, along with fairy and fantasy tales. It is underpinned by elements drawn from the self, with the aim of creating a children's picture book containing high levels of originality.

Although it is intended for an audience aged from seven to nine years old, the narrative has the potential to engage audiences of all ages, as timeless stories can successfully communicate across generations. According to Lewis (1975), a story that is of interest only to a child is not a well-executed children's story.

The choice to target the specific age group of seven to nine-year-olds was made deliberately. This age range signifies a crucial developmental phase in children's cognitive and emotional growth, particularly regarding their literary and visual comprehension. It also marks a transitional period when children typically transition from picture books to more text-heavy narratives. Hence, this age group presents a unique opportunity to explore the challenges and possibilities of creating illustrations for transitional readers, aligning with the research objectives.

While the age group may appear narrow, there exists a substantial body of research and literature pertinent to seven to nine-year-olds. Developmental psychology and education literature extensively cover the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children in this age range. Additionally, the field of children's literature research has explored topics such as narrative complexity, visual literacy, and the role of illustrations in engaging young readers.

Importantly, this research employs an autoethnographic approach within the context of children's literature, making it inherently autoethnographic. It seeks to understand how autoethnographic illustration can create culturally relevant and meaningful narratives for young readers aged seven to nine. By immersing the researcher in the creative process and engaging with autoethnography, this research aims to explore how personal narratives and cultural contexts can enhance the reading experiences of young children.

Therefore, this research recognises the importance of the chosen age group while simultaneously adopting an autoethnographic approach to create illustrated children's books. It endeavours to contribute to the understanding of personal storytelling and cultural backgrounds in enriching the reading experiences of seven to nine-year-olds, aligning with the core objectives of the thesis.

The fairy tale as a literary form may be approached in various ways, one of which J. R. R. Tolkien discusses in his essay *On Fairy-Stories* (1964). According to Tolkien, the appealing quality of fairy stories is their ability to function as a form of world creation, which he describes as the author fully exercising their responsibility as a subcreator. Rather than merely commenting on life, Tolkien creates a supporting world.

In his collection of essays *Of Other Worlds* (1975), C. S. Lewis uses analogy to explain that the importance of fairy-tale stories can be seen in their impact on the audience (p. 45):

It stirs and troubles him (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach, and far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth. He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.

In the context of this design project, the researcher is cognisant of the argument made by Lewis that the author needs to express a deep sense of self and the world around them. This approach is forwarded in creating *The Winged Bear* picture book, crafted with elements from self-experience and Tolkien's method of world-building.

With this in mind, the narrative for this project aspires to enrich the viewer's imagination. It offers them a world where the stars listen to their silent whispers, and hope can be discovered if one perseveres, and that hope will endure in the mind of the reader-viewer (Figure 6).



**FIGURE 6**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Spread four illustration from 'The Winged Bear' picture book*. The bear traverses the rough seas, searching for the star, encapsulating the concept that hope can be discovered if one perseveres.

### 2:3 Picture Books and Visual Storytelling

The picture book as we know it today is a visual story comprising words and pictures. It is regarded by many as the ultimate demonstration of the illustrator (Salisbury, 2004). The form of the picture book encompasses “a coming together of concept, artwork, design and production” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 51); when done well, it functions as a piece of art in and of itself.

The best picture books are known to entertain and stimulate the imagination of children and adults, becoming timeless artworks. Considering the concept of a picture book as an artistic expression helps to position this project within an artistic inquiry. The practitioner in this context will be the author-designer, otherwise described as the maker or practitioner. Within picture books, the imagery conveys the narrative and, in most cases, the subtle messaging and meaning materialise through the interplay between word and image. These separate entities would cease to make sense if experienced apart from one another (Salisbury & Styles, 2012).

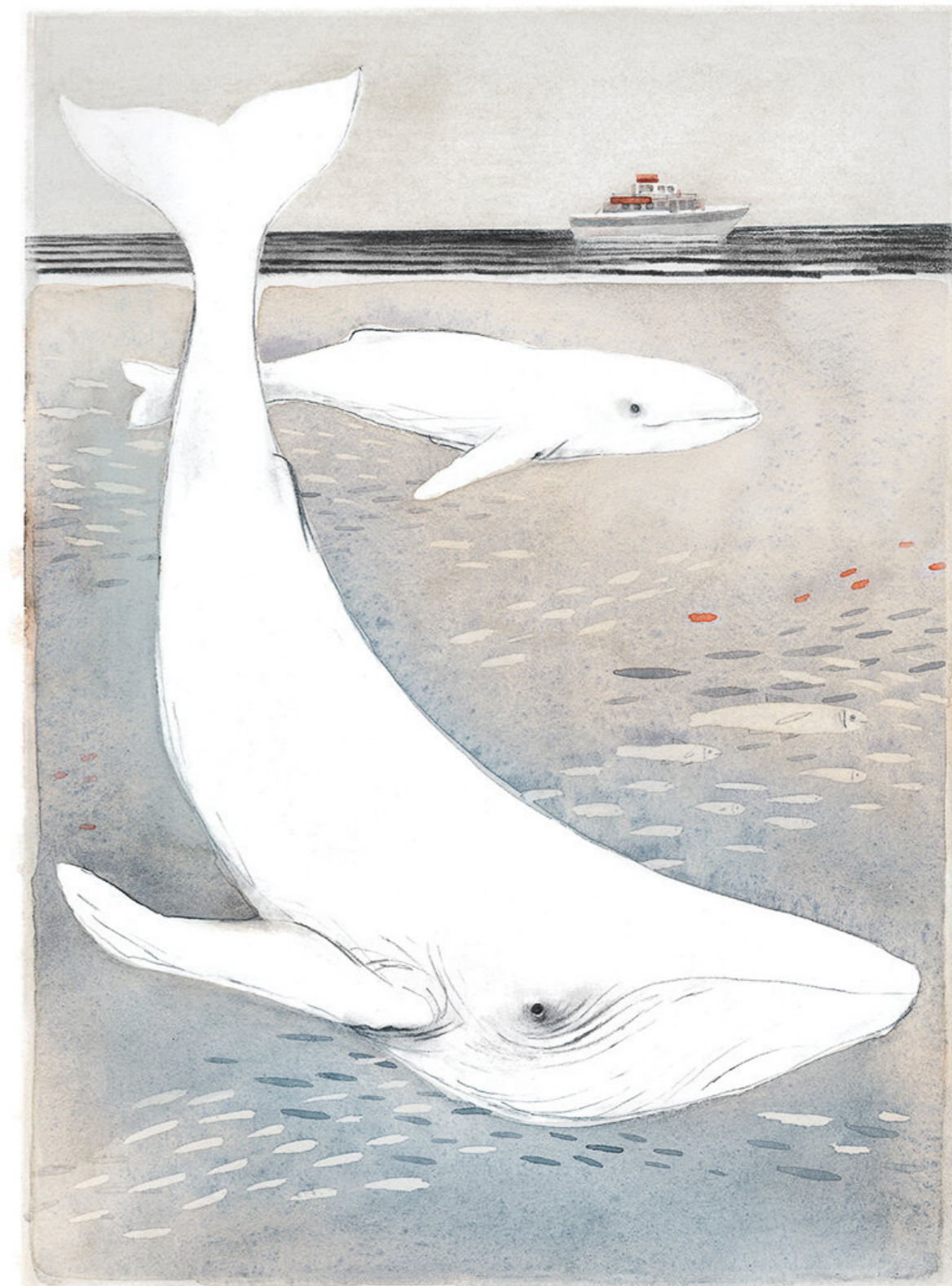
The space between word and image must be formed within the realm of the picture book, allowing the audience room to interpret and create their unique narratives inside the story. For this to occur, the layout of the written narrative alongside the imagery requires careful consideration and balance; they are to complement rather than repeat one another. The insight gained through the literary research establishes what a successful approach to anthropomorphic and fairy-tale storytelling entails. Therefore, this contextual research helps to inform and shape the project’s narrative and visual components.

### 2:4 Contextual Practitioners and Picture-book Designers

Each of the following contextual practitioners discussed in this section has significantly impacted the visual identity of this design project. They are all accomplished picture-book makers, authors and illustrators. Although each maker is inherently unique in their approach to design, style, medium and tone of voice, all have in common their practices and their aim to exude childlike joy, playfulness and curiosity. This design project aims to achieve all of these. That being said, it is helpful to consider their practices and the ways in which they contributed to the inspiration and creation of the visual language in *The Winged Bear*.

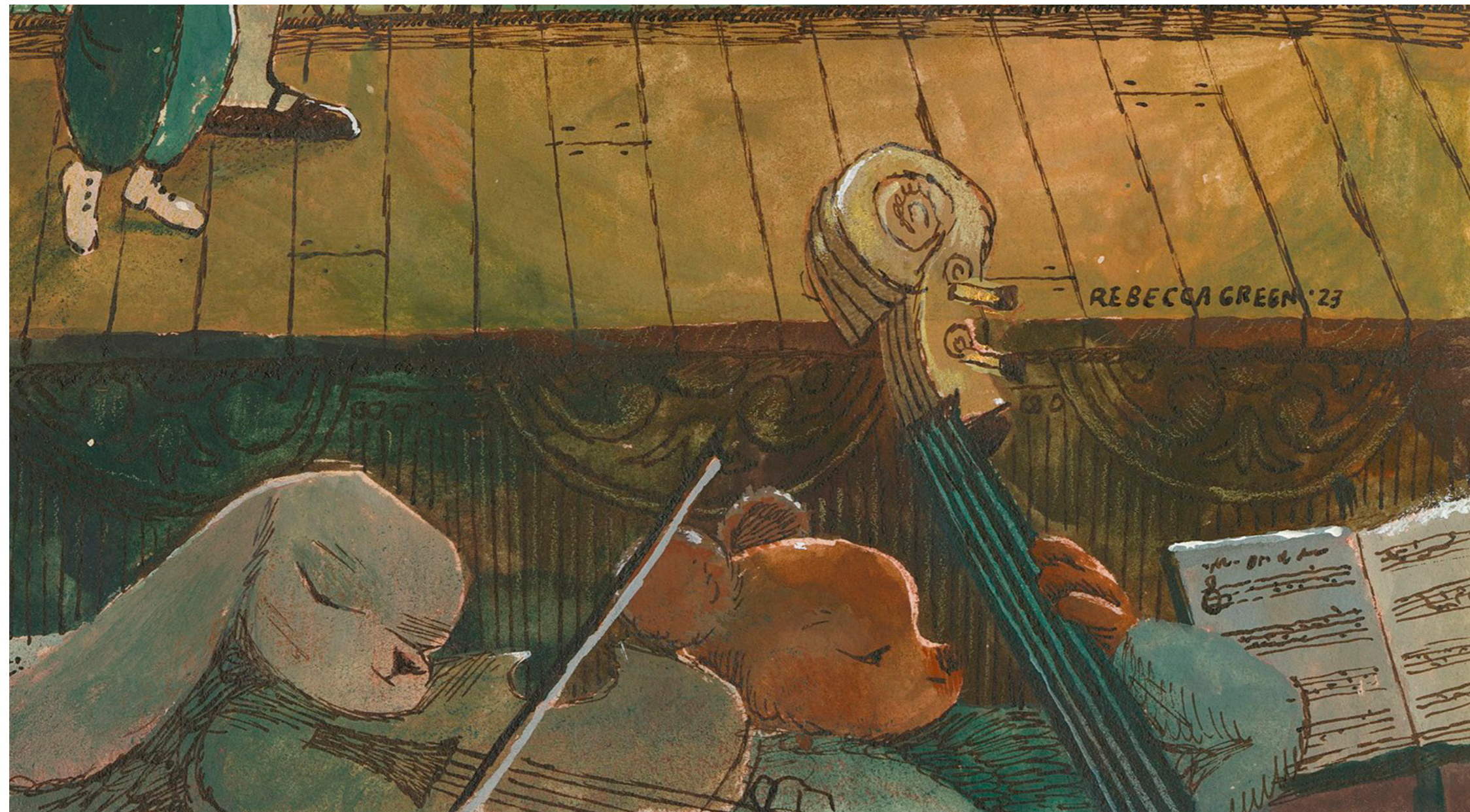
*Isabelle Arsenault, Children’s Book Illustrator*

Isabelle Arsenault’s illustrative work is best known for its poetic expression, encapsulated within the graphic universe she depicts. The overall charm of her children’s books can be seen through the gentleness and flow of her line-work and colour palettes. She uses a mix of image-making techniques and a multi-media approach that varies from project to project, depending on the desired atmosphere and inspiration. The aspect of her work most relevant to this design project is the way she approaches illustration. Arsenault (2016) uses each project as an opportunity to invent a world: a visual language that carries the story (Figure 7). In this, she relies heavily on her intuition to achieve a sense of what feels right for the outcome of each book.



**FIGURE 7**

Arsenault, Isabelle. 2016. *You Belong Here*. Used with permission.



**FIGURE 8**

Green, Rebecca. 2023. *My Great Expedition*, close-up. Used with permission.

**FIGURE 9**

Green, Rebecca. 2023. *My Great Expedition*. Used with permission.



*Rebecca Green, Illustrator and Author*

Rebecca Green is most known for her work illustrating picture books, in which her traditional hand-painted imagery expresses the timeless celebration of storytelling, seasons, nostalgia and home. Green's work and practice have significantly impacted the creative practice developed throughout this Master of Design journey. Her monthly blogs and the added content she provides for her Patreon members have served as guiding lights, and have helped to direct, educate and inspire the illustrative decisions and techniques behind *The Winged Bear*. Her recent work, *My Great Expedition* (2023) (Figures 8 and 9), showcases themes of reverence mixed with escapism through the childlike lens of playful celebration. These concepts, along with her illustrative and storytelling processes, have been essential factors in helping to inform the visual language within this design project.

*Erin Vest, Digital Freelance Illustrator*

Erin Vest is a digital illustrator whose work is heavily steeped in quiet fairy tales and fantasy, combined with saturated storybook colours. A distinct softness is exhibited within her illustrations, which give the impression of slowness and movement (Figure 10). Each image is layered to enhance textures seen in more traditional mediums, adding depth and tactile qualities to her work. These facets, alongside her masterful composition, have been influential contributors to the visual identity of this design project.

These contextual artists have become essential parts of this design project. Each of their creative voices has helped shape and mould the direction, creative process and visual storytelling surrounding the making and experimental decisions behind the creation of this picture book. By studying their creative processes, techniques and image-making methods, the researcher has gained valuable insight into the balance of integrating practical image-making knowledge with the intuitive flow state that comes with creative expression: in this case, illustration. Childhood and nostalgia are significant themes in these practitioners' practices, and the embodiment of the self is naturally displayed within their visual storytelling.

## 2:5 Summary

This chapter has established the contextual review of knowledge, reflecting on a picture book's literary components and visual language that influenced this project. Other areas of investigation discussed within this chapter include analysing anthropomorphic, fairy-tale and fantasy storytelling, as well as contextual practitioners that inspired the visual identity of the research. That said, the insight gained through the contextual review has helped inform and provide context to creating an original story. In the next chapter, the thesis will discuss the methodology, methods and journey of practice involved in the research.

This content has been removed by the author due to copyright issues.

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**FIGURE 10**

Vest, Erin. Retrieved 01.04.2023. *Bloom*.



# 3

## 3:1 Overview

The research design for this project involves a practice-led methodology that is activated through diverse methods of inquiry. This chapter will discuss the paradigm from which it emanates and the specific methods applied in the project.

## 3:2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is an extensive model that provides a researcher with particular values and viewpoints, and influences the way in which the research problem is approached. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that a paradigm is a group of values, beliefs or assumptions organising the world view.

This design project is situated as a practice-led paradigm that turns aside from the positivist objectivity tradition and classical empiricism. As such, it is “concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice” (Candy, 2006, par. 1).

Such research is oriented towards discovery through a process of inquiry conducted by making and reflecting on that practice.

This process allows the visual storytelling to unfold through the lens of child-like wonder, and the artefact (the picture book) culminates the experience in this context. This embodied knowledge is imbued within the storytelling through the journey of the protagonist, a bear who dreams of flying and sets out on a transformative journey of discovery, leading to hope.

## 3:3 Research Methodology

Procreative practice drives the inquiry while it is also the research outcome. In this context, a practice-led methodology shapes the research design underpinning this project, allowing the designer to incorporate the creative practice, methods and design outcomes into the research design and as a part of the research output.

Practice-led research as a methodological approach is currently employed across various creative disciplines. As a result, it has contributed to the recent story of the way that creative practice as a form of scholarly research has been brought into university higher degrees.

This research approach offers the creative practice the freedom and reflection required to construct an original visual story. The study seeks to investigate the ways in which research into anthropomorphism coupled with autoethnography may help the design and originality of a picture book. With the methodology established and positioned within a practice-led inquiry, the creative practice resides within the realm of evocative research. This project involves an ongoing discussion between the written story and the visual imagery, realised in a narrative that aims to produce resonance by evoking child-like wonder and adventure. This resonance might be achieved within the character of the story’s protagonist and her journey, outworked through the design and written narrative.

Therefore, in this study, a practice-led methodology is a natural emanation from a postpositivist paradigm. This is because the researcher negotiates territory through illustration and story-building with lived experiences.

Visualising the narrative requires strategies to draw from the tacit to inform the creative practice. Reflective methods enable this project to integrate ideation and action, thinking through drawing to conceptualise a visual narrative. Inside the design process, the researcher employed reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, aware of a process of “reflective conversation with the materials of a situation” (Schön, 1983, chapter 3, p. 78).

### 3:4 Autoethnography

This project explores an autoethnographic approach as a methodology for creating narratives. An autoethnographic approach to design research has been becoming progressively more accepted in the realm of scholarly research in recent decades. Invigorated by a postmodern sensibility in which there is no one correct form of knowledge, other points of view are accepted and valued (Duncan, 2004). In the context of this project, autoethnography is employed as a methodology for creating a narrative that borrows elements from self-experience. It is paired with anthropomorphism and other literary devices, such as allegory and metaphor, to produce an original visual story. The research is sourced from the stories of the self, exploring personal experiences and self-reflection to evoke emotional resonance with the audience (Anderson, 2006).

These elements are then used to create a visual narrative alongside illustrations articulated in the form of a picture book. The autoethnographic approach allows the practitioner to create an authentic sense of self and identity, valuing the collection of personal data to describe and reflect the social and cultural (Finlay, 2020).

Using autoethnography, *The Winged Bear* creates the signature and voice of personal interpretation of the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

The iterative illustration processes dialogue with the narrative-building, creating connections between the design-making and the researcher’s “own personal experience” to gain “a greater understanding of this area of focus” (Finlay, 2020, p. 15). Formative childhood and young adulthood memories are recalled, expressing the journey of discovering hope through the lens of childlike wonder. Methods utilising more intuitive instincts and tacit knowledge, such as conceptual drawing and illustration, are where the autoethnographic application of storytelling is more prevalent and outworked. That said, personal experience is imbued and embodied within the story and world-building subtly and intuitively; this is most evident in the colour choices, forms, shapes and composition, which represent the story’s tone, feel and mood. Hindsight provides the researcher with a deeper understanding of the ways in which the elements of the self have been scattered throughout the imagery, pervading the very essence of the story.

In the context of this research, autoethnography served as a valuable tool to incorporate personal experiences and self-reflection into the narrative, aiming to establish emotional resonance with the young readers, the target audience of the children’s book. The researcher adeptly utilized autoethnography to explore their own lived experiences, emotions, and perspectives, seamlessly integrating them into the narrative’s fabric.

By infusing personal anecdotes, reflections, and emotional insights into the storyline, the researcher aimed to create a relatable and emotionally engaging narrative for young readers.

This approach was intended to enable the audience to connect with the characters and their journeys on a deeper level, as they encountered authentic human experiences woven into the story.

The research sought to transcend conventional storytelling boundaries through autoethnography, providing young readers with an immersive and emotionally resonant reading experience. Within this nuanced exploration of personal experiences and self-reflection, the research aimed to enhance the book’s capacity to evoke emotional engagement and resonance with its young audience, enriching the overall impact and appeal of the children’s book.

### 3:5 Research Stages

According to Smith and Dean (2009, p. 5), the generation of knowledge through creative practice resides in “the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research”. In order to observe the academic rigour in scholarly research and maximise the chances of discovery, this project designed a methodological approach with four distinct phases: Conceptual Drawing, Plot Development, Mapping of the Visual Narrative and The Illustration Process (Figure 11).

The research steps involve iterative cycles of testing and refinement, which are condensed into the circular process of planning, implementing, refining and reflecting (Willis & Edwards, 2014).

The process begins again at the end of each cycle after the final model or artefact has been tested, analysed and refined. A heuristic approach was used within the action research iterative cycle, as it allowed a trial-and-error strategy to help produce results within the short time frame of each cycle.

Action research, positioned as a central component of the research process, emerged as a vital tool in the iterative cycles. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, the research embarked on an exploration of how action research informed and shaped the research process. This exploration encompassed a detailed examination of the specific actions taken, the outcomes achieved, and the invaluable insights gained from each iteration.

By utilising action research, the research was able to implement a structured trial-and-error strategy while adhering to the project's time constraints. This research approach aimed to seamlessly integrate ideation and action, using reflective methods to conceptualise a visual narrative effectively. The exploration of action research delved into the practical aspects, outlining the actions taken to bring the project to life, the tangible results achieved at each stage, and the learning that emerged from this iterative process.

Intricately woven into the action research framework, the heuristic approach played a distinctive role in shaping the research's trajectory. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, the research embarked on an exploration of how the heuristic approach was integrated and applied throughout the research process. This exploration encompassed a detailed examination of how the heuristic approach fostered ideation, encouraged experimentation, and generated meaningful insights.

The heuristic approach served as a guiding principle within the action research iterative cycle. It facilitated a structured trial-and-error strategy, allowing the research to navigate the project's time constraints effectively. The exploration of the heuristic approach delved into the practical aspects, providing insights into how it influenced decision-making, encouraged creative experimentation, and contributed to the project's overall success.

### 3:6 Research Methods

In this research, five methods have been employed to help effectively synthesise the collected data and communicate the findings through visual storytelling. These primary methods include:

- Literature Review as a Method for Contextual Research
- Conceptual Drawing
- Plot Development
- Mapping of the Visual Narrative
  - *Flat Plan*
  - *Sketching Thumbnail Spreads and Storyboarding*
  - *Dummy Book Prototype*
- The Illustration Process.

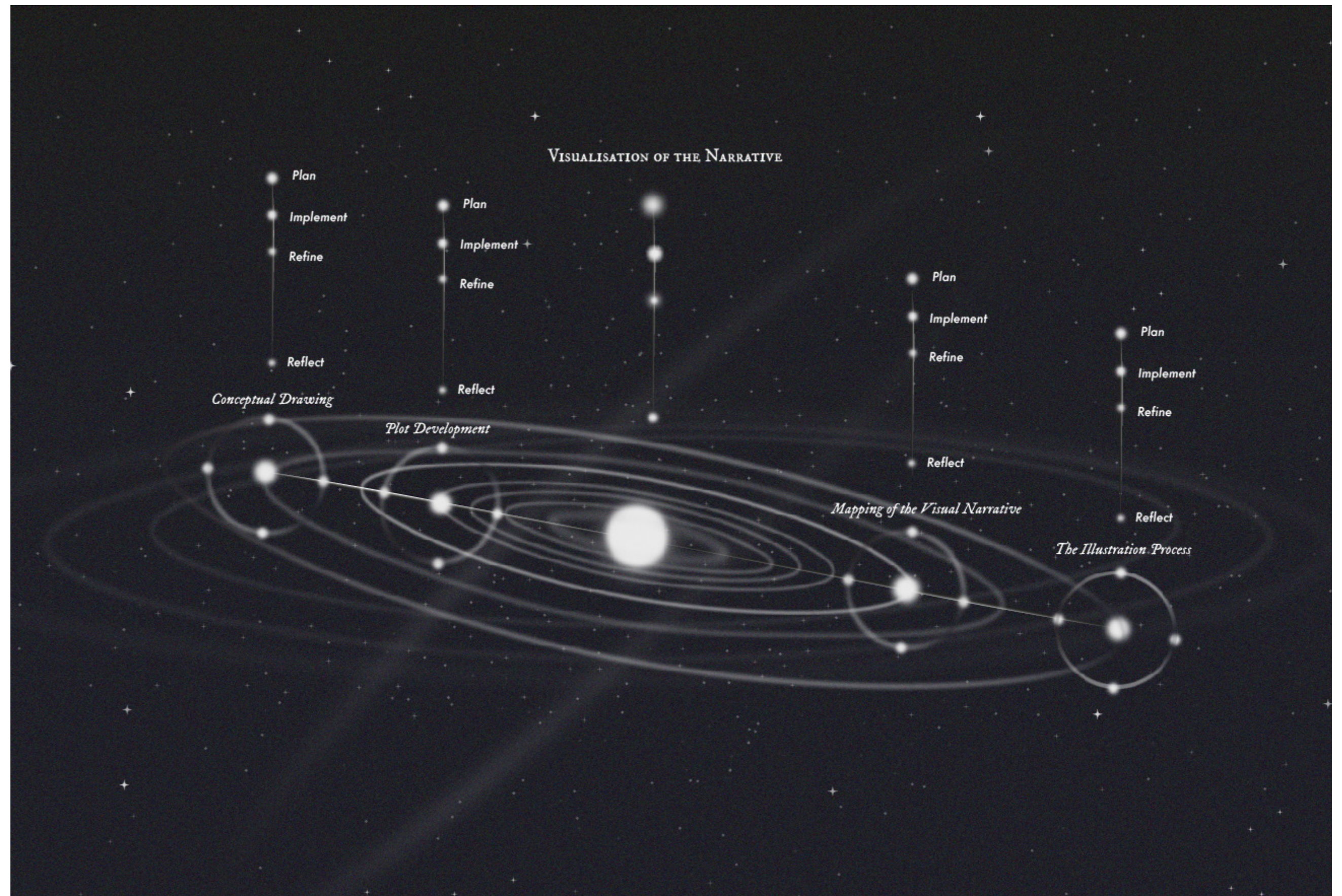
### *Literature Review as a Method for Contextual Research*

According to Snyder (2019, p. 333), “building your research on and relating it to existing knowledge is the building block of all academic research activities, regardless of discipline”. From the outset of this design project, literature related to the history and evolution of anthropomorphism in visual storytelling was analysed to understand the context imbuing the narrative. In order to employ anthropomorphic storytelling strategies within the visual narrative, the research into the literature provided a framework to establish what would be an effective and ineffective approach to creating the story.

Through the literature research, the researcher reviewed and analysed seminal texts and strategies relating to anthropomorphic storytelling. This review offered insight into the critical and cultural interpretation of the ways that animals are represented in visual narratives. The review provided further insight into character exploration and traits, allowing freedom beyond the limitations human characters offer.

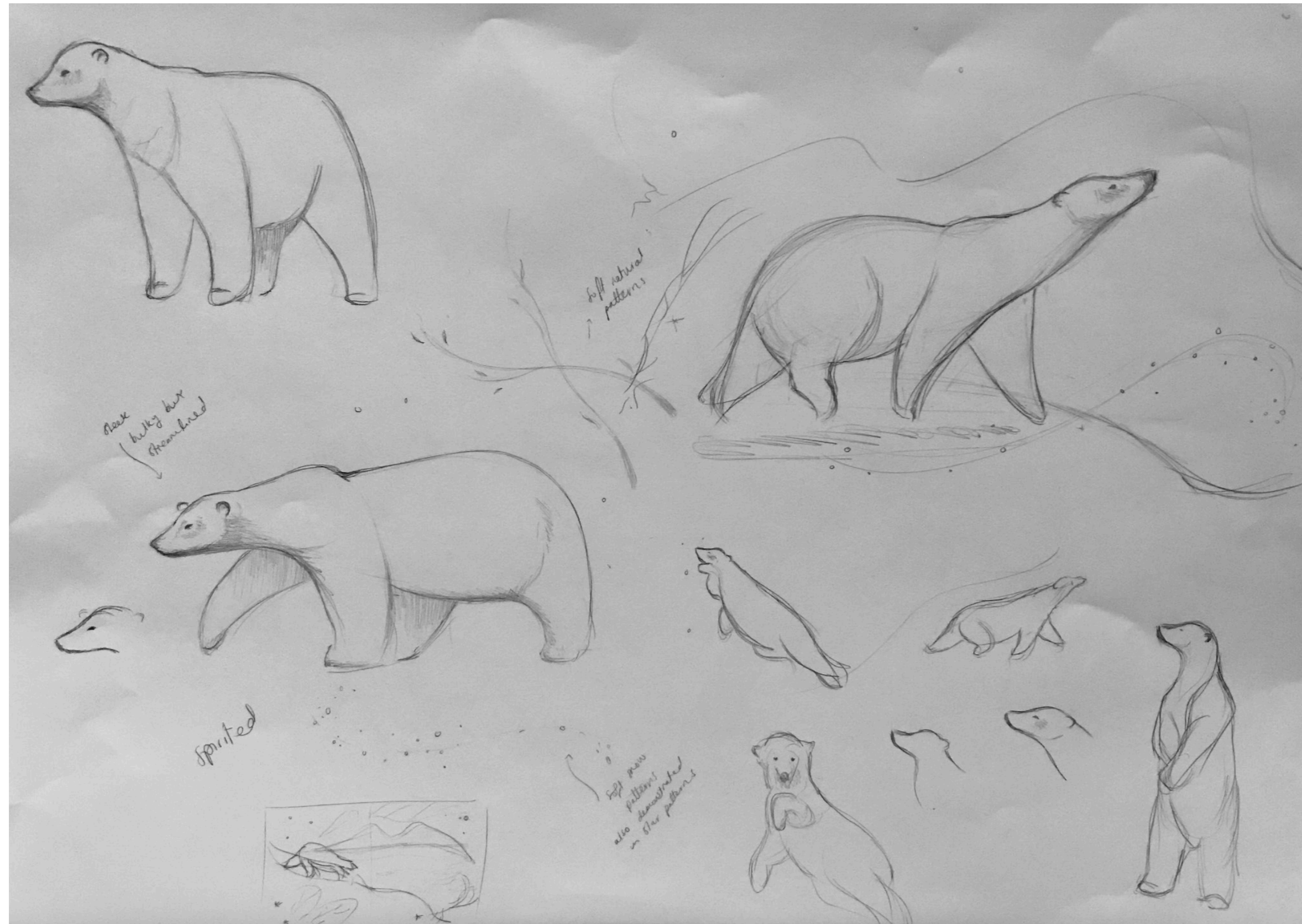
In the context of this project, there is a particular consideration for the semiotics of representation created by the talking animal, which Wells (2009, p. 93) suggests “functions as a created phenomenon, as a symbolic paradigm to evaluate, and as supernormal stimuli by which to access a deeper, more primal mode of lost knowledge and experience”. The story takes the audience on a transformative journey, elevating hope and imagination through the protagonist’s journey and the ways in which she overcomes challenges.

The information gathered from the literature review on anthropomorphism has served as a reference for the narrative development. It has also guided the poetic symbolism, which the bear and the surroundings are elaborated to represent alongside the design of the picture book. By this, we mean the way in which the story, illustrations and type are composed in an editorial space.



**FIGURE 11**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Diagram of the iterative cycle process.*



### **Conceptual Drawing**

This design project explores the methods used to synthesise image and textual data creatively into a visual narrative. The intention has been outworked through conceptual drawing, which Salisbury & Styles (2012, p. 56) define as “thinking through drawing” and using show-don’t-tell techniques to conceptualise the visual narrative.

The process employed to articulate the visual tone of the written story was sketching on paper and then digitally editing the resulting drawing in Adobe Photoshop. These initial developmental sketches are where the ideas are conceptualised and implemented through the action of drawing. Sketching was a starting point for discovering loosely the visual identity and for communicating the words through images. It can be understood as seeing the world through the lens of child-like wonder, where the ideation process begins. The visual narrative evolves as the pencil is placed on paper, conceiving illustrative ideas.

**FIGURE 12**

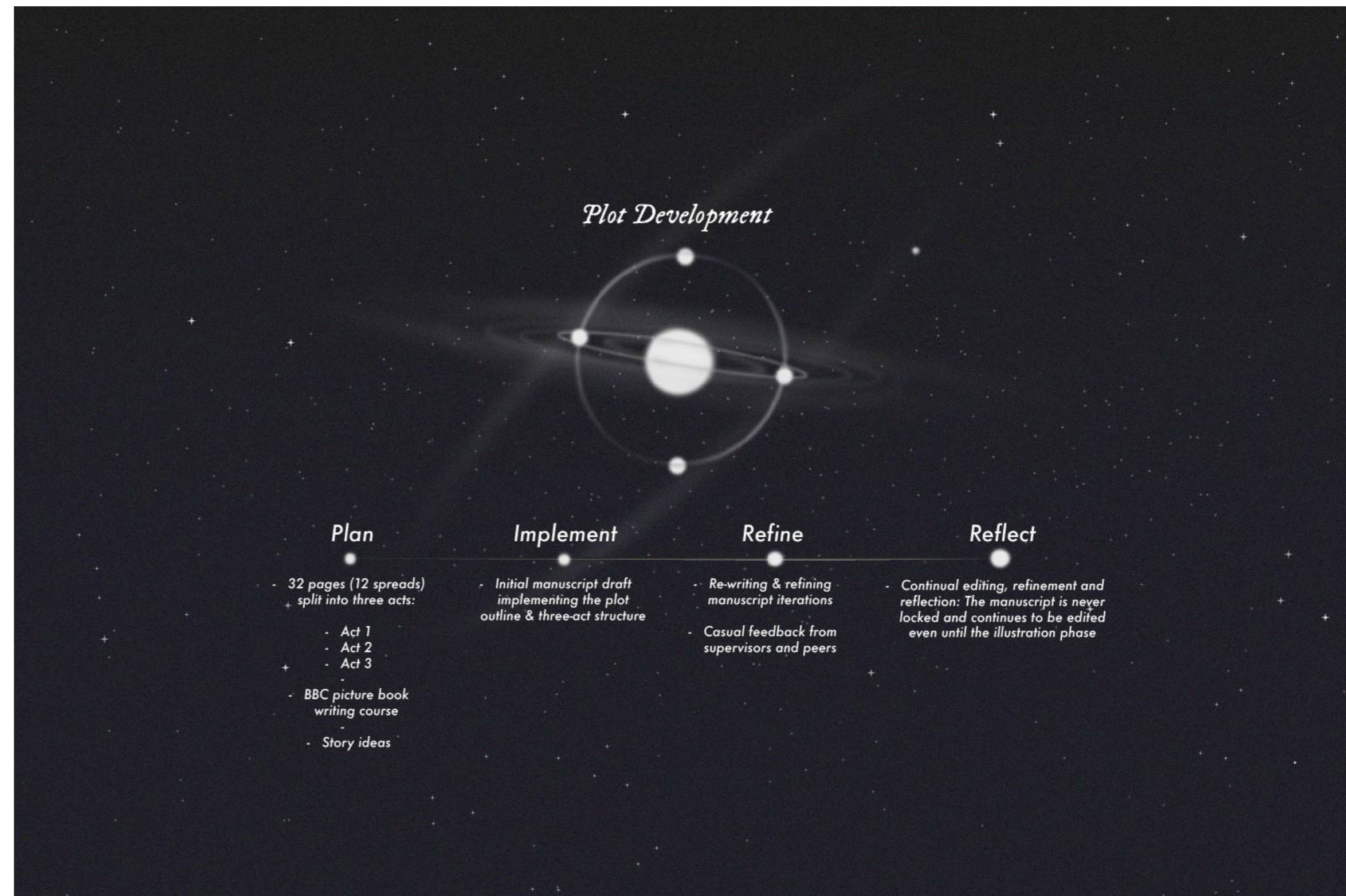
Patience, Braidie. 2023.  
*Development sketches.*

### *Plot Development*

Developing a narrative for a picture book requires careful consideration of the plot, which is, essentially, the story structure. Creating an intriguing, satisfying, yet unpredictable plot can be the most challenging part of the writing process. The narrative drafting for this project was developed using an iterative cycle consisting of stages of planning, implementation, refinement and reflection (Figure 13). This process continues even during the storyboarding and illustration phases.

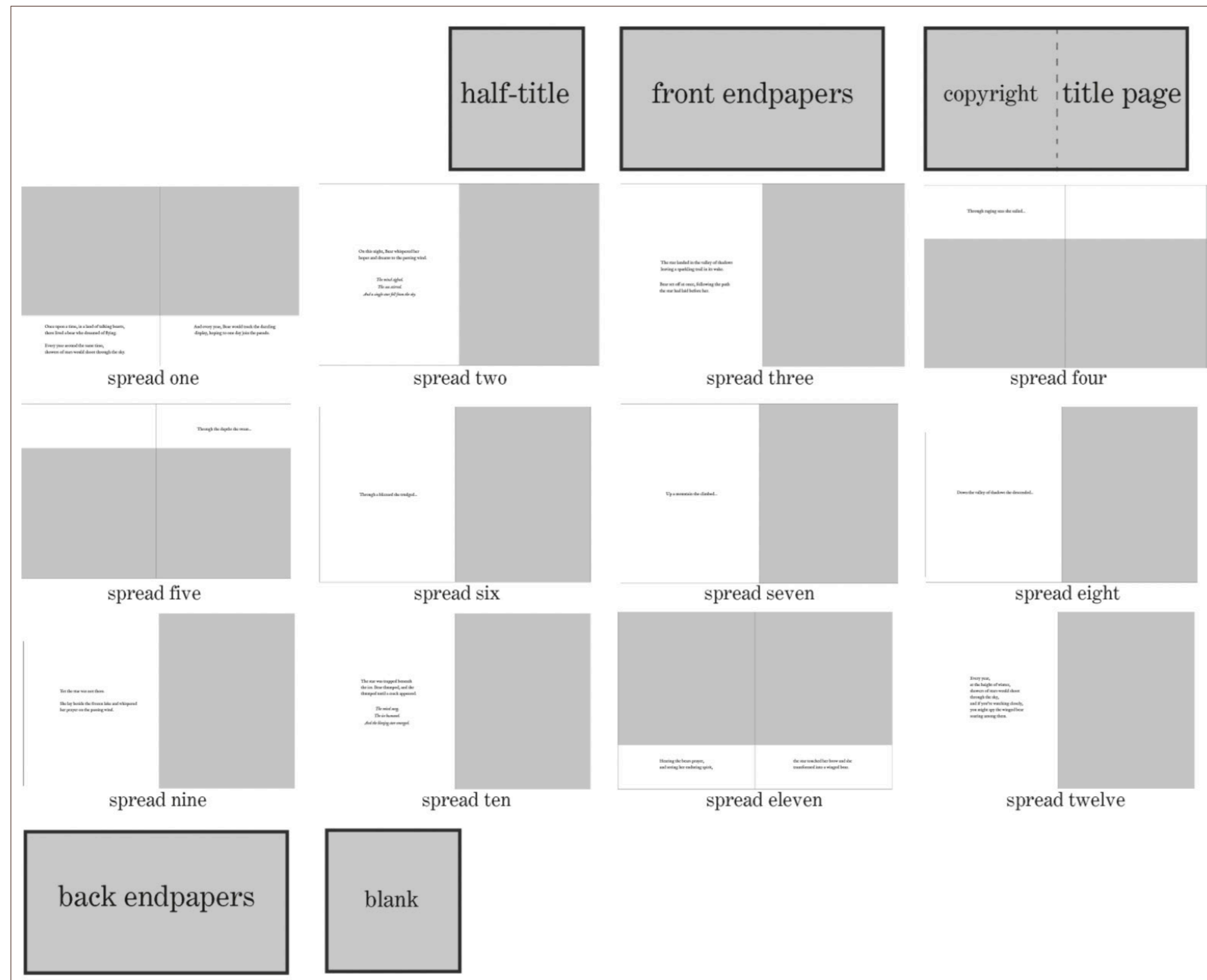
### *Mapping of the Visual Narrative*

Producing a visual narrative that relates to a resonant story requires detailed planning. To achieve this successfully, an amalgamation of words and pictures must occur. Elements of pace, suspense, rhythm and flow were considered to create a cohesive experience, culminating in a picture book. When planning and developing the story into sequential scenes, the production was devised into the following stages: flat plan, sketching thumbnail spreads and storyboarding, and a dummy book prototype. The final stage in the production is the illustration process. These methods provide a framework within which the visual narrative develops and transforms into the final artefact. The planning tools give the creative process a sense of structure and allow both words and pictures to be combined, establishing the individual scenes or acts and the ways in which they might work together and flow within the narrative. As Salisbury & Styles explain, picture books are best described as “a coming together of concept, artwork, design and production that gives pleasure to, and stimulates the imagination of, both children and adults” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 50).



**FIGURE 13**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Plot development diagram of the iterative cycle process.*

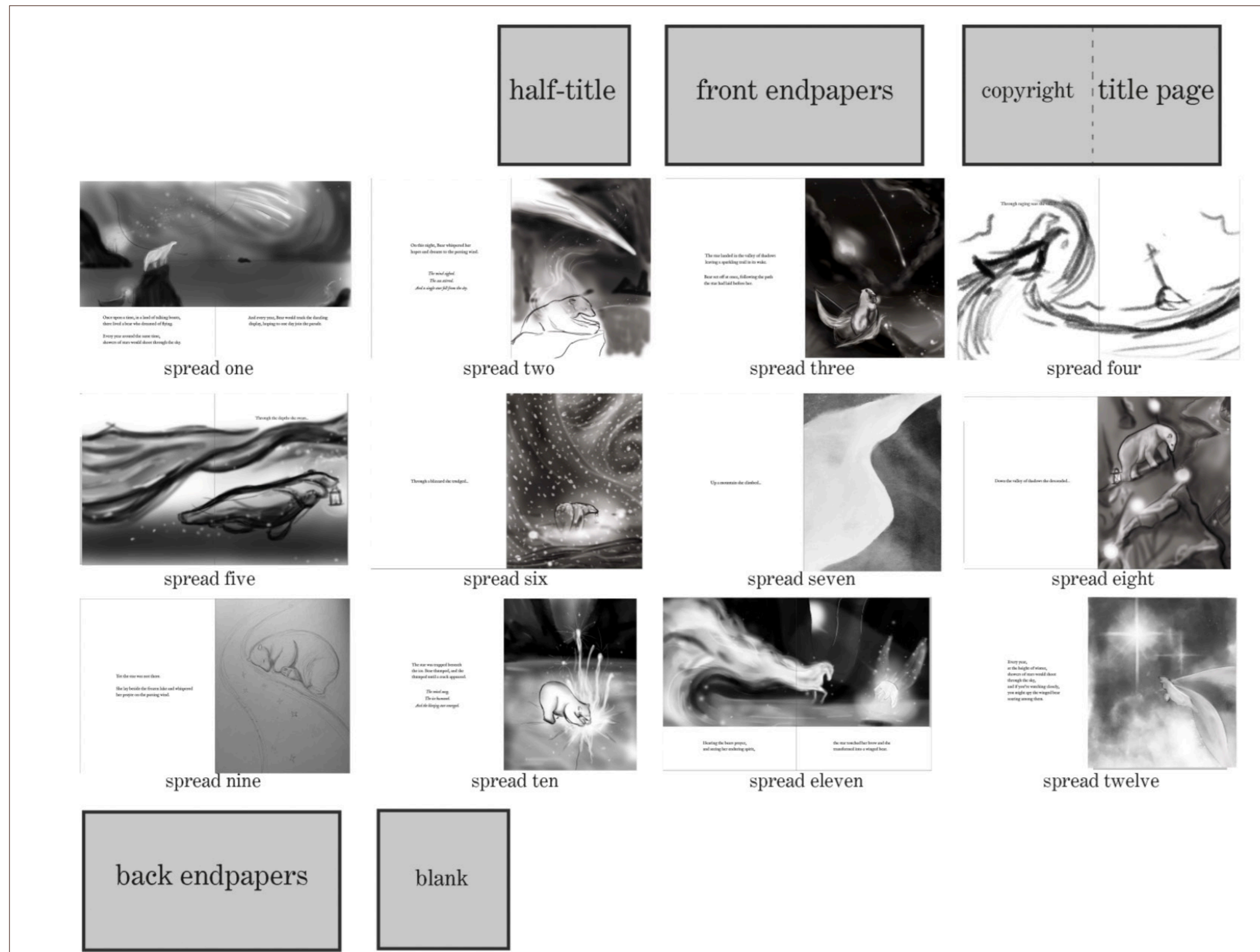


*Flat Plan*

The flat plan draft is the first step in the production, initiated during the beginning planning stages of the picture book's visual narrative. Design consideration for the picture book is initially outworked in the flat plan drafting stage. The flat plan is an overview of the rough layout and page count, where the storyline is situated within the page spreads. It is a two-dimensional plan, drafted in Photoshop, which helps to determine the sequence of pages and the way that the text flows within the pages and spreads. At this stage, text, layout and illustration place-holders are a work in progress and are subject to change until the picture book is set to be printed. There is always room for improvements and tweaks.

**FIGURE 14**

Patience, Braidie. 2022.  
*Flat plan layout.*



*Sketching Thumbnail Spreads and Storyboarding*

Sketching thumbnail spreads is the next step, where rough drawings of the conceptualised narrative are drafted on paper and refined in Adobe Photoshop. These drafts are placed alongside the provisional text on the pages to form an initial visual overview. This process is part of discovering where everything sits within the pages in order to visualise the way that the words and pictures interact. The next step in the production is storyboarding, where the thumbnail sketches are revised. The aim of this process is to refine and edit the words and pictures to clarify the visual narrative, ensuring the composition, page design and spreads communicate effectively. Once the visual story has been established, the storyboards may serve as outlines for the illustrations. In this design project, the thumbnails and storyboarding have been combined, allowing more freedom for the illustration process. Some of the storyboards within the spreads are more refined than others. However, further refinements and composition changes can be addressed during the illustration stage.

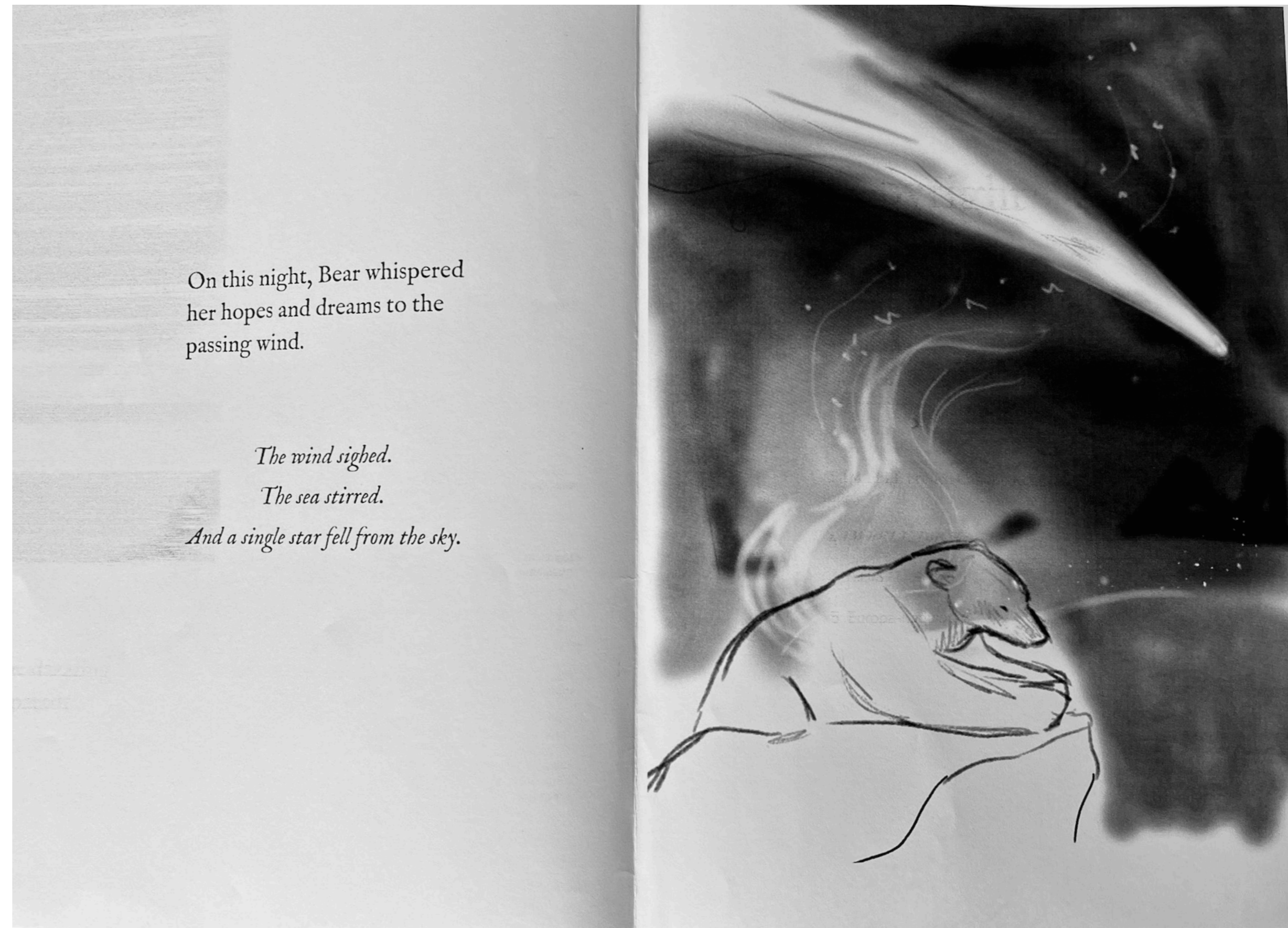
**FIGURE 15**

Patience, Braidie. 2022.  
*Flat plan and storyboard.*

### *Dummy Book Prototype*

Creating a dummy book brings the two-dimensional construction of the visual narrative into the physical, three-dimensional space. The creation of the dummy book is the process that gives the designer a sense of how the pages look in physical form and provides an understanding of the ways in which the artefact will be experienced. The illustrations are the book's main focus, with the text considered alongside the illustration design for cohesion. Much thought is given to the white space interspersed throughout the design of the picture book; it allows the audience a brief visual break to take in the illustrations.

In this production stage, the dummy book serves as an experimental prototype, which offers the form and function to be considered alongside the designed pages. The printed material showcases the actual dimensions of the picture book, whereas, in digital form, it is difficult to ascertain accurately aspects such as font size in relation to the illustrations. This step brings the digital and the physical book together and allows a fuller sense of the design of the picture book to be viewed and adjusted accordingly.



**FIGURE 16**

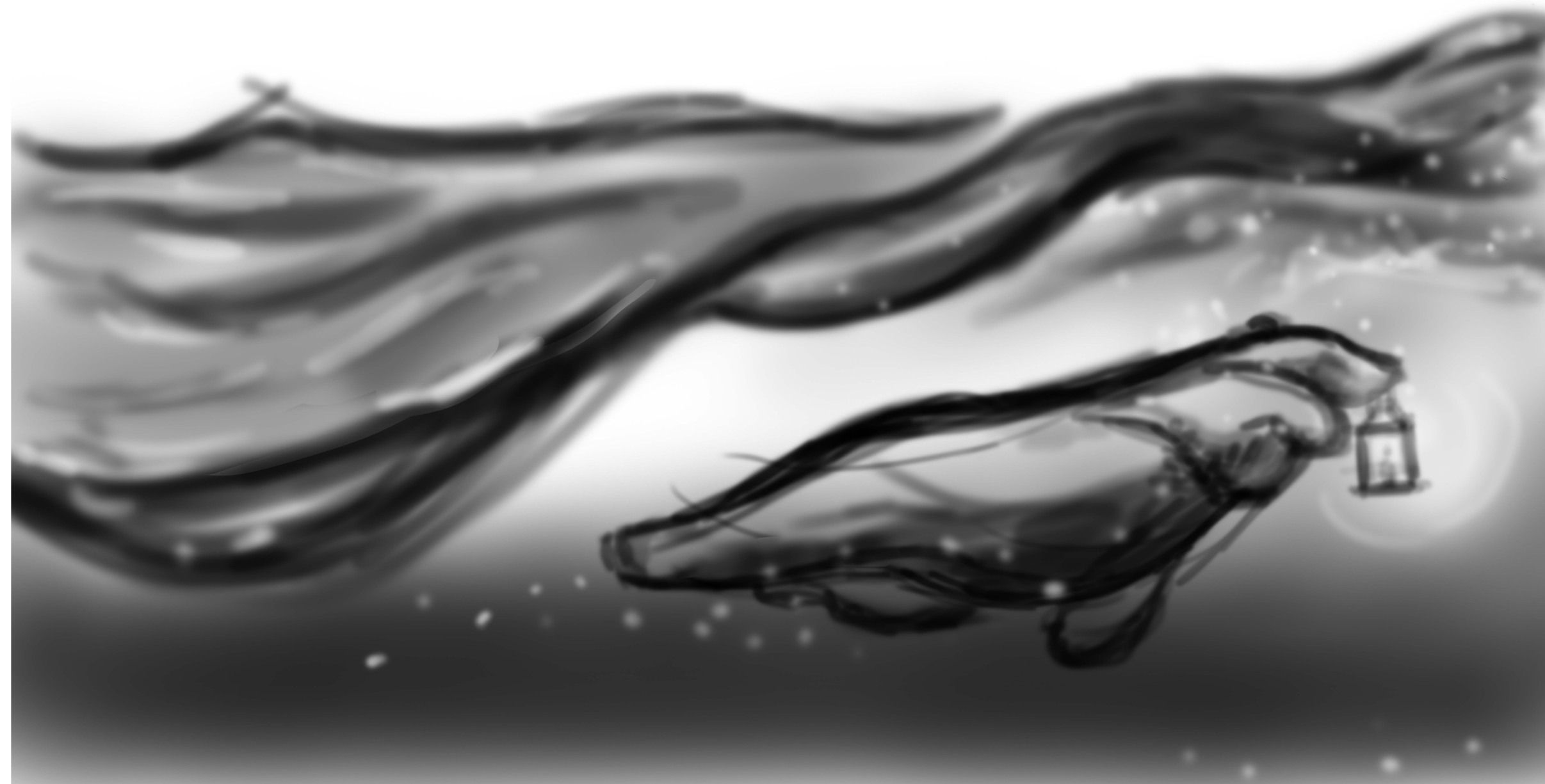
Patience, Braidie. 2022.  
*The Winged Bear* rough  
dummy book, spread one.

### *The Illustration Process*

The illustration process for this design project required less structure than did the previous stages, relying more on intuition and flow to reach the outcome. The illustrations were conceived using a combination of traditional and digital painting techniques. These techniques included layering watercolour washes over digital paintings to achieve a printed, tactile storybook-like effect. The practicality of the time constraints for this project played a seminal role in the choice of a multi-media approach to illustration. However, the freedom and fluidity of editing and painting in the digital realm allowed the illustrations to achieve the atmospheric and ethereal qualities initially envisioned by the designer.

The approach to each illustration is different, depending on the tone and mood of what the story is communicating. Some begin with a rough sketch, while others are initially painted in black and white. The black-and-white renderings allow the composition and values to be viewed as a whole, ensuring the elements convey a sense of movement before delving into the detail and colour (Figure 17).

With the composition and mood of the piece established in black and white, the next step is blending colour, overlaying and texturing the painting until it feels right. Here, the feeling of rightness is an embodied negotiation with tactile skills and aesthetic sensitivity, melting together action and consciousness. Elements such as line-work, colour, values, texture and composition are used artistically to convey essential aspects of painting technique that require attention to detail and methodic refinement. The imagery evokes a sense of depth, movement and, most importantly, the flow of the narrative, paired with the illustrations (Figure 18).



**FIGURE 17**

Patience, Braidie. 2022. *Black-and-white underpainting*.



### 3:7 Summary

The research design for this thesis examined the journey of practice involved in the creation of an original narrative, expressed through the form of a children's picture book. The practice-led nature of the research emphasised processes of experimentation and reflection explored through the following methods: Literature Review as a Method for Contextual Research, Conceptual Drawing, Plot Development, Mapping of the Visual Narrative and The Illustration Process.

Having discussed the research design underpinning this project, it is now helpful to consider the critical commentary and review the design decisions informing the research.

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#### FIGURE 18

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Spread five, final illustration outcome.*



# 4

This chapter offers a critical commentary reflecting *The Winged Bear's* creative process. It is divided into five sections: Character Design and World-Building, Visual Storytelling and the Plot, The Significance of the Bear as a Character, Illustrative Style and Colour. The first section considers the concepts and themes interwoven and expressed throughout the narrative, evidenced through the character design and world-building. The second section explores the visual storytelling of the picture book and explains the way in which the plot was devised. The third section investigates the importance of portraying a bear character in a children's picture book. It also explains the thought process behind the character design. The fourth section discusses the picture book's techniques, format and application, encapsulated in the illustrative style. The fifth section delves into the colour systems and aesthetic choices in setting the scene, determining each story sequence's tone and mood.

## 4:1 Character Design and World-Building

Character development in children's picture books requires considerable time to be focused on sketching or drafting the plot to create consistent and believable characters. There are a few ways in which the characters reveal themselves in the design and development process. Salisbury (2022, p.168) explains:

Sometimes the artist may have a very clear idea in mind as to the key personality traits of the character(s), while sometimes the characters may only really assert themselves (and perhaps surprise their creator) on paper, as the drawing grows in confidence.

For this project, the main character, including the key personality traits and physical characteristics, was envisioned early in the process. In contrast, the world and the secondary characters came almost as surprises or as serendipity. The secondary characters began to unfold through the storyboarding and illustration stages, consequently reshaping and rewriting the narrative in the process. The interactions between the characters and their world add richness to the story, and they are amplified through the final illustrations.

The character design for this narrative relied on the world in which the protagonist lives. Throughout the development of the plot, it became clear that the characters and the world needed to be considered together as a whole. This concept was solidified as the secondary characters were drafted, and the world of *The Winged Bear* became a living and breathing environment, where the concept of anthropomorphism imbued not only the animals but, also, the natural environmental elements, such as the sky, stars, wind, sea and ice. These elements are sentient as the *stars parade across the sky*, the *sea stirs*, the *wind sighs and sings*, and the *ice hums*. Each character is a living entity with their own human-like personality. In the narrative, each of these secondary characters asserts their respective identity and, in turn, begins to dictate and drive the development of the narrative as they react and respond to the bear as any secondary character would.

## 4:2 Visual Storytelling and the Plot

Visual storytelling in this context combines word-writing and picture-making. How they interact and work together must be considered in order to determine what exists in the world between words and pictures. Scriptwriting is a method used in film production and it is through the traditional three-act structure that the story is drafted. The manuscript is established by separating the narrative into three phases, otherwise known as acts or the “crisis, climax, and resolution” (McKee, 1997, p. 217). These three phases are also known as the beginning, middle and end. With the visual elements in mind, the written narrative was constructed, leaving space for the words and images to come together, and allowing readers to make unique interpretations. The following paragraphs briefly outline the story sequences to provide an overview and structure of the visual story.

### Act 1: Crisis – The Beginning

The *first act* sets the scene for the story by establishing the world, introducing the audience to the protagonist (the hero) and setting up the premise. This illustrated story unfolds when the protagonist, the bear, reveals her motivations, communicating her dream of growing wings and making a home among the stars. Another critical moment happens as the inciting incident occurs. The bear whispers her dream on the passing wind and, in response, a single star shoots down from the sky, landing in the valley of shadows, the dark canyon between two looming mountains.

### Act 2: Climax – The Middle

The *second act* is where the protagonist faces conflict and challenges that must be overcome; she is catapulted into action where her transformative journey awaits. Following what takes place in the first act, the bear embarks on a journey to find the star, hoping its discovery will grant her seemingly impossible wish. This act visualises the adventure and tests her character, showcased within the illustrations. The bear must persevere as she traverses rough seas, climbs the highest mountain and, finally, descends into the valley of shadows. This series of events leads to the story’s climax, upon which the bear realises her mighty efforts were in vain, as the star is nowhere to be found in the valley’s darkness. Scared, alone and without the sparkling trail that the star left behind for her to follow, the bear does not give up. She whispers her prayer for guidance on the passing wind. In response to her prayer and seeing her enduring spirit, the star reveals itself, glowing brightly beneath the thick lake ice within the valley; this prompts the bear to act and free the trapped star.

### Act 3: Resolution – The End

The *third act* provides a resolution (Brütsch, 2015, p. 302). The falling action sequence occurs with the bear freeing the star trapped beneath the frozen lake. With the star now free, the bear’s dream is granted as the star touches her brow, and the bear is miraculously transformed into a winged bear. The tale concludes with the winged bear shooting through the sky. This story conveys the subtle message that hope might be discovered through quiet endurance, consistency and perseverance.

### The Winged Bear | 32 Page Plan: Version 6

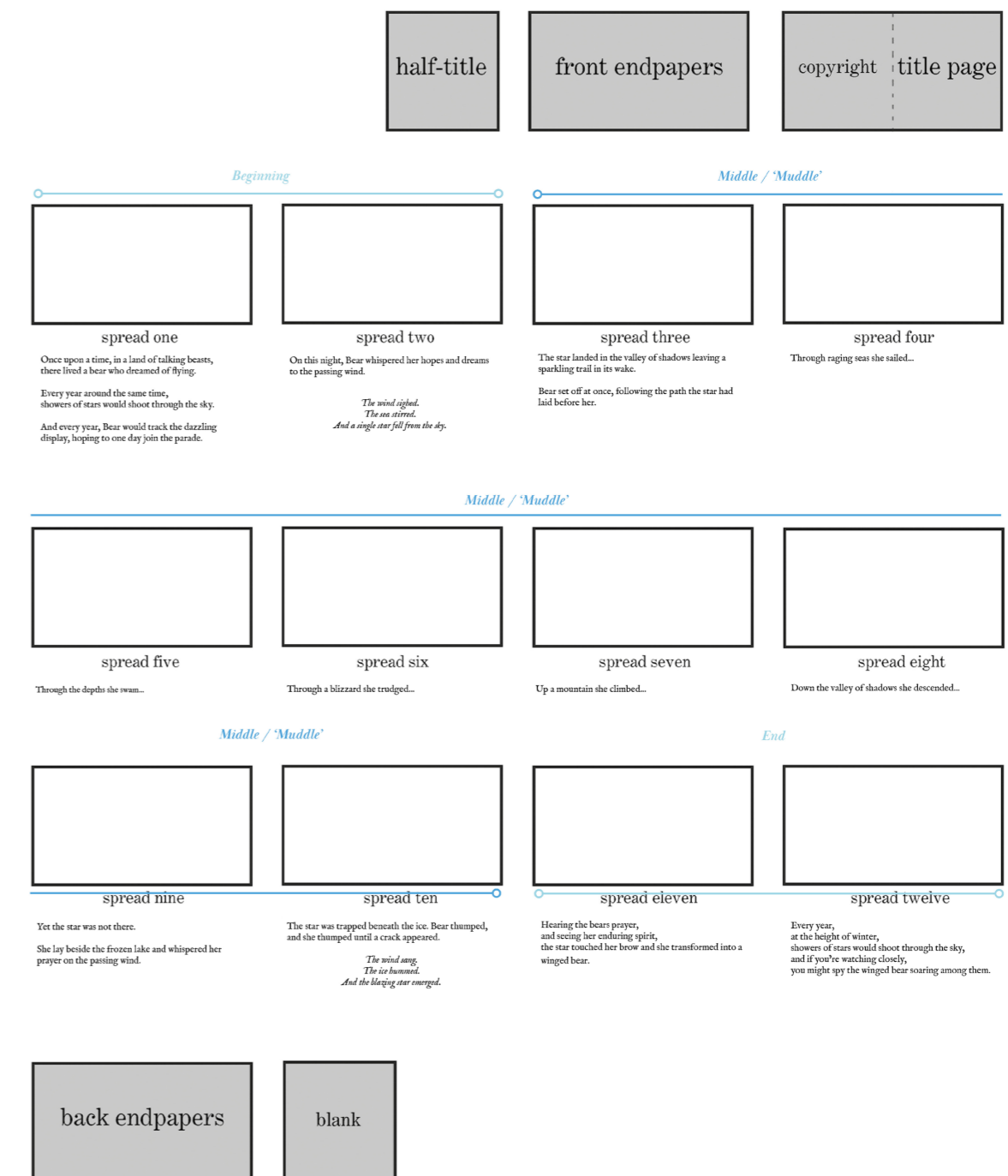


FIGURE 19

Patience, Braidie. 2022. *Initial map of the narrative containing layout and the manuscript draft.*

### 4:3 The Significance of the Bear as a Character

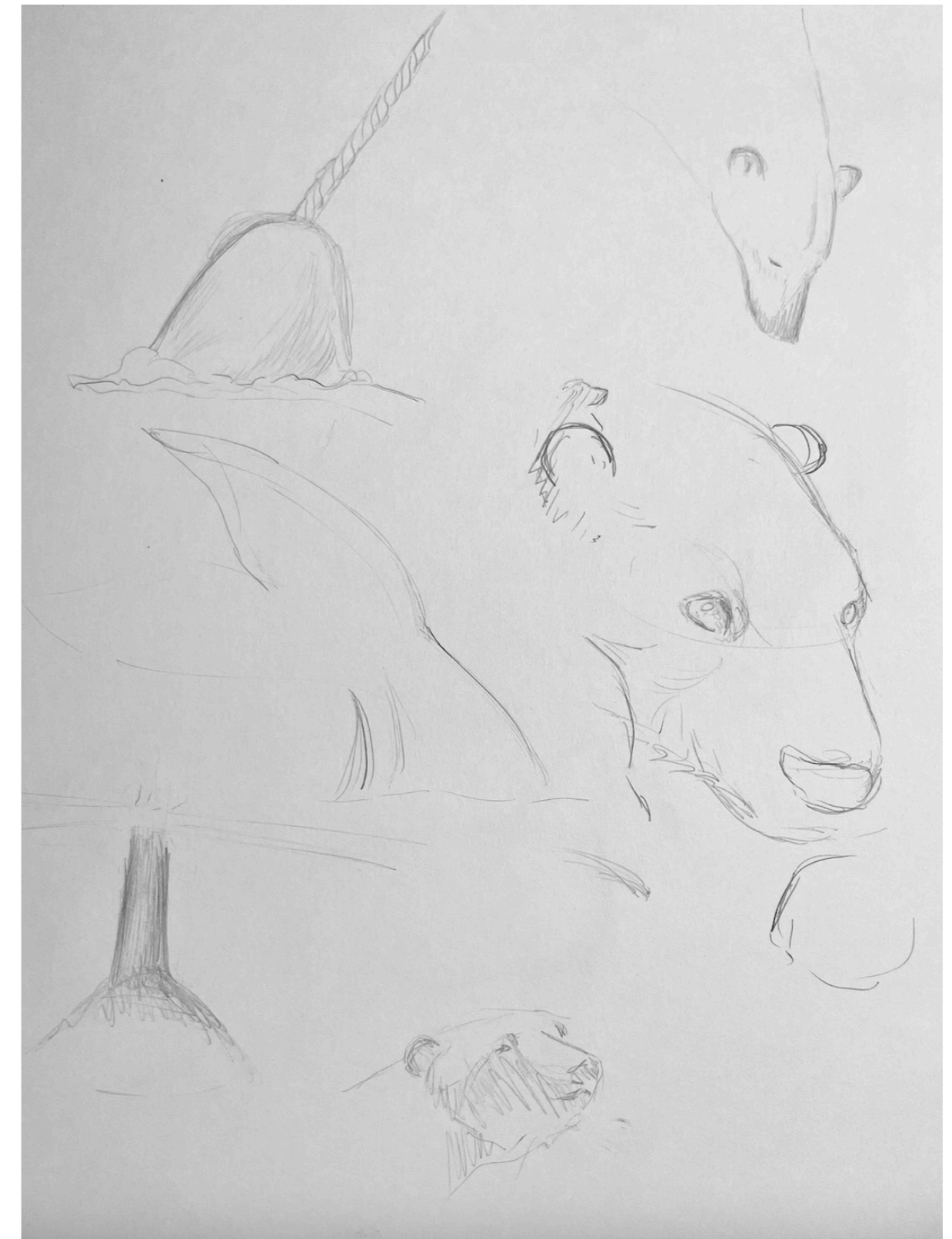
Renowned picture-book maker Raymond Briggs states that “everyone has to do a bear book, sooner or later. It’s compulsory” (Briggs & Jones, 2003, p. 116). This sentiment was expressed around the time he wrote *The Bear*, which was first published in 1994. It is widely considered a nursery classic and, within it, he captured a feeling of gentleness throughout his illustrations, crafted with soft pencil crayons.

The following quote from Sir E. Leopold McClintock was recorded by Briggs during his preparation for *The Bear*, arguing, “we see, we talk, and we dream more of bears than of any other animals” (Briggs & Jones, 2003, p. 116). This statement best summarises the reasoning for portraying a bear character as the main protagonist in *The Winged Bear*. Rather than steering clear of bear characters, which are often featured in children’s literature, Briggs believes it is almost a rite of passage for picture-book designers and makers to include them at some point or another.

*The Winged Bear* features a female bear protagonist. The character design for the bear initially consisted of a combination of brown bear and polar bear characteristics. However, through many design iterations, the bear went in and out of featuring more technically accurate representations of bear-like anatomy, and became a more cartoonist, animation-inspired creature. This design choice best-represented attributes like softness and gentleness, which were conveyed in the line-work and curves of the character design. The choice to depict a bear character as the protagonist in this tale was consciously made not only for the soft and comforting qualities the bear represents but, more so, for the natural weightiness and heavy-laden grounded attributes that they exhibit.

In contrast with the protagonist’s desire to fly, these characteristics formed the initial intrigue and gave the story a sense of significance, expressing the concept of freedom discovered by casting off one’s burdens; this is epitomised as the bear takes flight, achieving a sense of weightlessness.

The design of the character and world for the narrative explores concepts and themes that are gently interspersed throughout the words and imagery. These consist of childhood nostalgia and memories intuitively woven into the story, alluding to the joy that was found in facing the confusion, pain, trauma and loneliness that comes with the human experience; this is something to which most, if not all, people can relate at some stage. The narrative presents a subtle allegorical theme of discovering the Christian faith. This concept is intended to be touched upon lightly and is expressed symbolically through the bear’s desire for a greater purpose than the one she previously knew. Also, the wings are intended to symbolise this longing for freedom and escape from her current circumstances; other elements representing particular aspects of the Christian faith are placed throughout the imagery. These additional elements include the bear’s plunge into the depths of the sea, representing baptism, as seen in spread five (Figure 18), along with the eternally burning lamp she holds in her mouth throughout the story, representing her unwavering hope. However, although these personal details have been woven into the narrative, they are not intended to be elaborated upon or considered too profoundly regarding the Christian faith. Instead, the audience is to be prompted by their own ideas and preconceptions of the visual imagery, allowing readers to fill the gaps in the story with their own experiences. The primary purpose of *The Winged Bear* is to convey a quiet and indirect story of hope, which is communicated through her journey. These elements embody the character and the design of the world in the picture book.



**FIGURE 20**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Bear character design sketches*. Featured are bear character design iterations among secondary characters and small drawings of the environment development for the lighthouse.

## 4:4 Illustrative Style

Throughout this research project, the illustrative style has been in the process of continual development. Much focus and consideration had been spent on this before the manuscript was drafted, as the style of the illustrations thoroughly impacted the storytelling and set the stage for the entire design project.

The imagery explored flat and washed-out aesthetics during the early stages of the process when defining the illustrative style (Figures 21 and 22), with the line-work and mark-making stressed throughout. These initial iterations offered a solid starting point but it was clear that the envisioned atmospheric qualities and moodiness had yet to be realised through these illustrations. When the storyboarding was under way and the black-and-white renderings were established, the sense of depth finally visualised by the designer emerged.

Illustrators tend to think more traditionally when telling stories, using lines and shapes to describe and communicate the narrative through their imagery (Salisbury, 2022). As we have seen, that is where the thinking involved in the initial stages of the illustrative style for *The Winged Bear* began. Before the black-and-white painting technique was established, traditional gouache painting styles were explored (Figure 22). Although testing different mediums to see which felt right for the project was helpful, the gouache iteration failed to reach the depth and uniqueness this project wanted to achieve. The discovery of the black-and-white painting technique offered a new perspective in the illustration process. Working tonally provided a re-imagined representation of the narrative, championing mood and composition. Salisbury (2022, p. 58) poetically and succinctly explains the method for approaching an illustration tonally. He states, “plot the areas of light against dark until the shape of the subject begins to emerge from the gloom”.



**FIGURE 21**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Earlier illustrative style exploration.*



**FIGURE 22**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Earlier illustrative style exploration.* Diluted out gouache on watercolour paper.

This best describes the way in which the illustrative style progressed into what emerged in the final picture book.

The illustrative style conceptually explores a delicate place where beauty and melancholy meet. Impressions of wistfulness and hope lurk within the imagery, conveyed throughout the predominantly blue-hued colour scheme and the accentuated tone and values.

Adobe Photoshop is primarily used to output these illustrations, thanks to the speed, variety and freedom this medium affords the illustration process. The digital painting was approached by viewing Photoshop, and the digital tools technology offers, as merely an extension of a pencil case or brush set, with many possibilities and materials available. The freedom and variety that digital painting offers, paired with traditional watercolour washes and overlays, enabled the illustrations to achieve an almost chiaroscuro-like effect. Chiaroscuro is an artistic technique primarily used in the visual arts to represent strong contrasts between light and shadows (Britannica, 2023). The contrast of light is known to achieve a sense of emotional tension, thus enabling the visual imagery to evoke a feeling or elicit an emotional response from the audience. By employing a version of this technique, the composition and tones of the illustration were emphasised, allowing a greater sense of depth within the imagery (Figures 23 and 24).



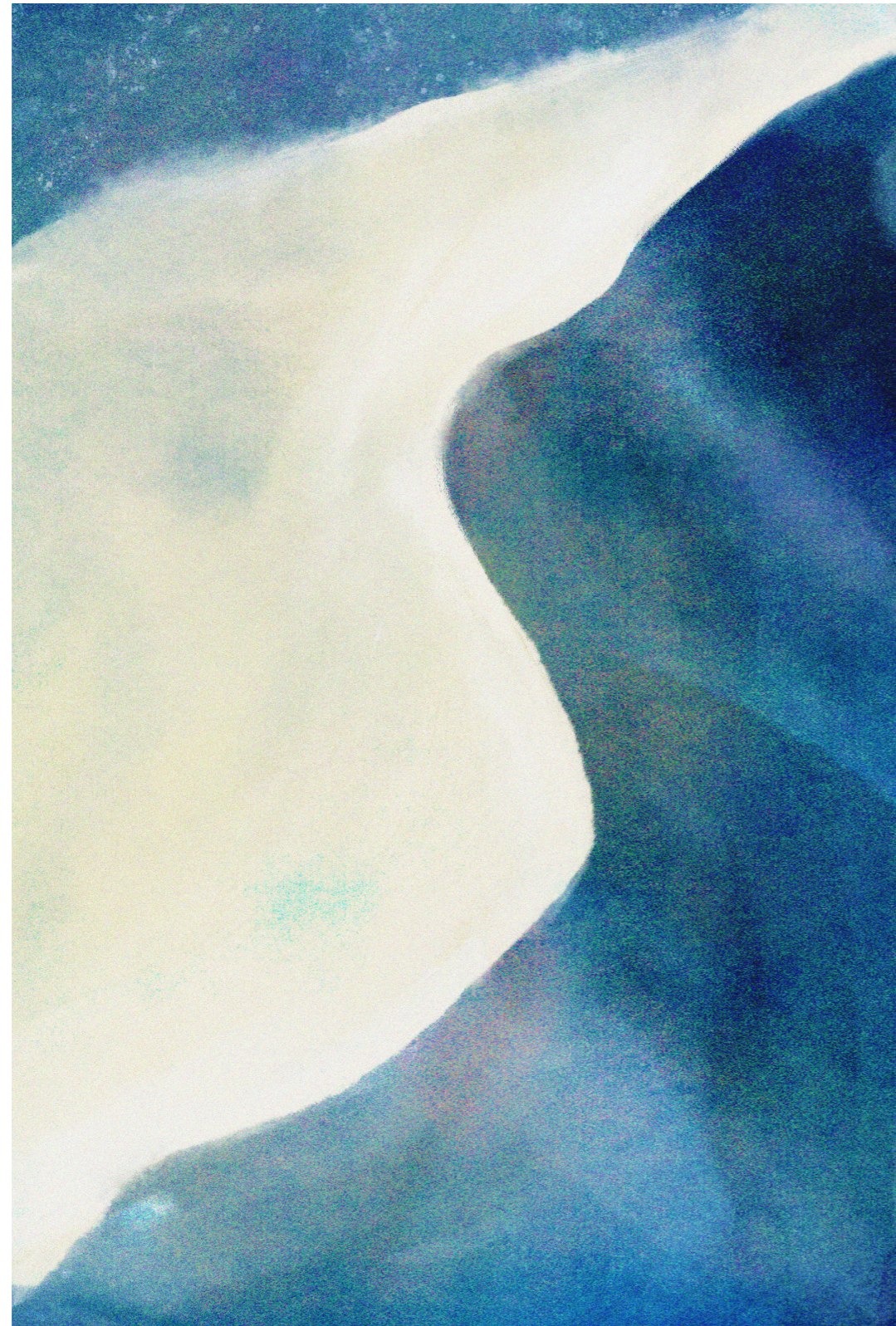
**FIGURE 23**

*Patience, Braidie. 2023. Chiaroscuro-inspired storyboard spread six.*



**FIGURE 24**

*Patience, Braidie. 2023. The chiaroscuro-inspired final illustration spread six.*



**FIGURE 25**

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *Spread seven final illustration.*

The rhythm and pacing of the written narrative are almost melodic at times, expressing a poetic sentiment. This poetically inspired writing style follows through in the illustrations, and is reflected in the stylistic choices and overall flow. Some spreads have been designed and painted more abstractly, contributing to the viewer's freedom of interpretation (Figure 25). Through the process of stylistic exploration, showcasing pieces of the story became more important while not fully explaining the whole meaning. As such, the protagonist throughout the story is mainly featured facing away from the viewing plane, almost always fully encompassed by the forces of the natural elements. The aim is to suggest the importance of an enduring spirit in the face of unrelenting circumstances.

#### 4:5 Colour

Learning to see and think in terms of colour can be difficult, yet it is a crucial skill for every illustrator to master (Salisbury, 2022). The turbulent transition from drawing to colour for this project was eased by re-imagining the illustrative process, considering the overall design through black-and-white renderings before delving into the detail of the coloured image. Determining a cohesive palette consisted of limiting the colours available, as there are almost too many options, especially when painting digitally. It was established at the outset that the primary colour range used throughout the illustrations would be a variation of blues. The choice to hero the colour blue stemmed from the symbolic associations attributed to the colour, such as depth, sensitivity, wistfulness and a touch of melancholy. The designer's natural leanings towards the hue also influenced this decision. Using a predetermined colour palette and limiting available options was a useful way to proceed. Complementary colours were then added to the illustrations; this varied from spread to spread and was guided by the narrative, which set the emotional tone.

Analysing colour for significance was important for this project in order to consider the way that young readers interpret and engage with the visual imagery. The colour selection for each illustration involved staying true to the emotional tone set throughout the narrative, yet it also considered the experience and engagement of the audience. The overall approach was for the picture book to present a cohesive, peaceful and soothing palette. Salisbury & Styles (2012, p.75) asserts that:

Children are appreciative of illustrations and often try to work out how they achieve their effects and what these effects signify. Young readers are especially sensitive to colour, saturation and tone, and seem to analyse their significance quite naturally. Note the serious attention children pay to every aspect of pictures that intrigue them.

The insight into young readers' sensitivity towards colour and the thought and care they take in analysing the imagery was considered as the coloured illustrations were conceived. Almost every section of the picture book has an iridescent or ethereal-like quality added to the illustrations. This application is intended to heighten the contrast, soften the moody blues and pique the viewer's interest with a touch of incandescence, whimsy and sparkle to light up the nightscape imagery. The interest and engagement of young readers are critical aspects of this project; the illustrations aim to portray the narrative through the lens of child-like wonder. This wonder is most notably displayed in the book cover design, where the shimmering winged bear reverently exudes a sense of child-like wonder as she cascades across the sky (Figure 26).



#### 4:6 Summary

This chapter examined and evidenced the design inquiry informing the research project. With the critical commentary concluded, the final thoughts and reflections will be discussed in the final chapter.

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#### FIGURE 26

Patience, Braidie. 2023. *The Winged Bear* picture-book cover illustration.



# 5

The storytelling process can be a cathartic experience for storyteller and audience alike, and this, in part, rang true during the development and creation of this picture book project. Research involving the creation of *The Winged Bear* employed a more personal approach to storytelling. The narrative and illustrations were imbued with subtle elements borrowed from self-experience, such as recalled childhood memories and nostalgia, conveyed through the lens of child-like wonder. My innate attraction towards and fascination with written and visual storytelling stems from the magical way a well-told story can communicate messages of hope and shared experiences. Storytelling has the ability to cultivate connection, enrich the imagination, and offer the audience metaphors and analogies that enable them to understand their lives better. In part, considering the picture book as a unique art form drove the visual exploration, experimentation and development of *The Winged Bear*. Studying contextual practitioners and picture-book designers, combined with literary research concerning anthropomorphism, helped to establish and inform the creative process and mould the visual language conveyed throughout the story.

Embarking on this illustrated design project presented its fair share of challenges and difficulties. Creating an original and resonant story is demanding; the complexity and pressure of crafting a seemingly effortless and well-told original visual narrative were, at times, overwhelming.

A practice-led methodological approach, along with the research design, helped inform and structure the study. The creative processes and methods developed through this thesis also served as guides for articulating and crafting the visual storytelling of *The Winged Bear*.

One of the main challenges faced throughout this project and the basis of a significant learning curve was the visualisation of the narrative process. This difficulty presented itself most when discovering the space between words and images within the picture book. Balancing the word-writing and image-making required careful consideration. A reflective conversation had to occur between word and image to ensure that each complemented, uplifted and avoided repeating the other. The visualisation of the narrative was conceived by establishing and applying the circular creative process of planning, implementing, refining and reflecting. This process was useful in the way it helped to test, analyse and refine the visual story. However, the visualisation of the narrative also involved utilising embodied modes of knowledge. This embodiment relied on intuition, and on a sense of creative flow outworked through the illustration process to help inform and shape the project's narrative and visual components.

## 5:1 Contributions to the Field

The thesis makes contributions to the field in two distinctive ways. Firstly, it employs anthropomorphism, paired with autoethnographic modes of storytelling, to generate a compelling and original narrative for an illustrated picture book. This was achieved and demonstrated through the visual storytelling of *The Winged Bear*. The study expands on and adds to the growing research on anthropomorphic and autoethnographic inquiry, manifested through the picture book. The author-designer uses reflective methods while integrating ideation and action, such as thinking through drawing and using show-don't-tell techniques to conceptualise the visual narrative.

Secondly, the thesis examines and describes the process and design thinking behind developing a children's picture book. The research contributes to the field of picture-book making by delving into the story behind the story, and adding to existing research through the creative processes evidenced in the creation of *The Winged Bear*. Such design processes consider page layout, character design and narrative design, expanding on and adding to artistic knowledge in picture books and exploring the role of the picture-book designer and maker, and their relationship with the illustration process.

## 5:2 Concluding

This research project has explored the ways in which stories sourced from the self, paired with anthropomorphism and other literary devices, such as allegory and metaphor, may be used to produce a compelling, original visual narrative, culminating in a picture book format.

The importance of nurturing the imagination through the storytelling of this project has been reflected in the visual exploration and poetically inspired narrative design of *The Winged Bear*. In the allusive world formed between word and image, the imagination is encouraged to roam freely (Hellige & Klanten, 2012). The overall aim of the visual story was to enrich young readers' imaginations and encourage them to envision a hopeful future for themselves. This encouragement to the readers is subtly conveyed through the narrative of the bear. She embodies and exemplifies an enduring spirit, quietly persevering when her adventure becomes scary and when she faces difficulties and challenges. This illustrated narrative offers the viewers a new world to explore: a living and breathing world in which the stars are alive, listening to them in the quiet hours of the night, and where a great winged bear is out there, shooting through the sky. I am reminded of Emily Dickinson's poem *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* which reads:

*Hope is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all -  
And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -  
And sore must be the storm -  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm -  
I've heard it in the chillest land -  
And on the strangest Sea -  
Yet - never - in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb - of me.*

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