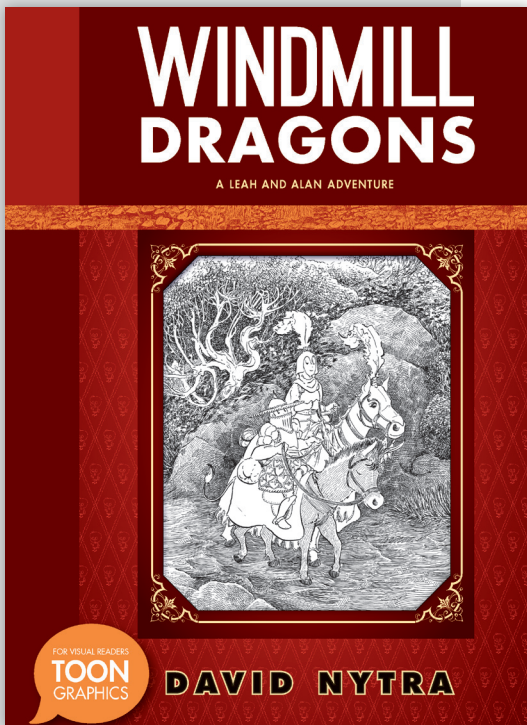




# Windmill Dragons

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

## TOON GRAPHICS FOR VISUAL READERS



### Windmill Dragons

A Leah and Alan Adventure  
by David Nytra  
A TOON Graphic  
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www.TOON-BOOKS.com  
Please get in touch with your suggestions at  
[mail@TOON-books.com](mailto:mail@TOON-books.com)

### THE TOON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TEAM:

**Richard Kutner** is a translator of both prose and graphic literature with a thirty-three year background in education. He holds degrees from both New York University and Yale, and was the 2014 recipient of a Hemingway Grant for his work with TOON.

**Lydia Nguyen** is a cartoonist and illustrator attending the Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction Vermont, where she also teaches children how to draw comics. She holds a degree in history from Fordham University and her short form comics have appeared in several anthologies.

TOON Graphics are comics and visual narratives that bring the text to life in a way that captures young readers' imaginations and makes them want to read on—and read more.

The very economy of comic books necessitates the use of a reader's imaginative powers. In comics, the images often imply rather than tell outright. Readers must learn to make connections between events to complete the narrative, helping them build their ability to visualize and to make "mental maps." A comic book also gives readers a great deal of visual context that can be used to investigate the thinking behind the characters' choices.

### PAY ATTENTION TO THE ARTIST'S CHOICES

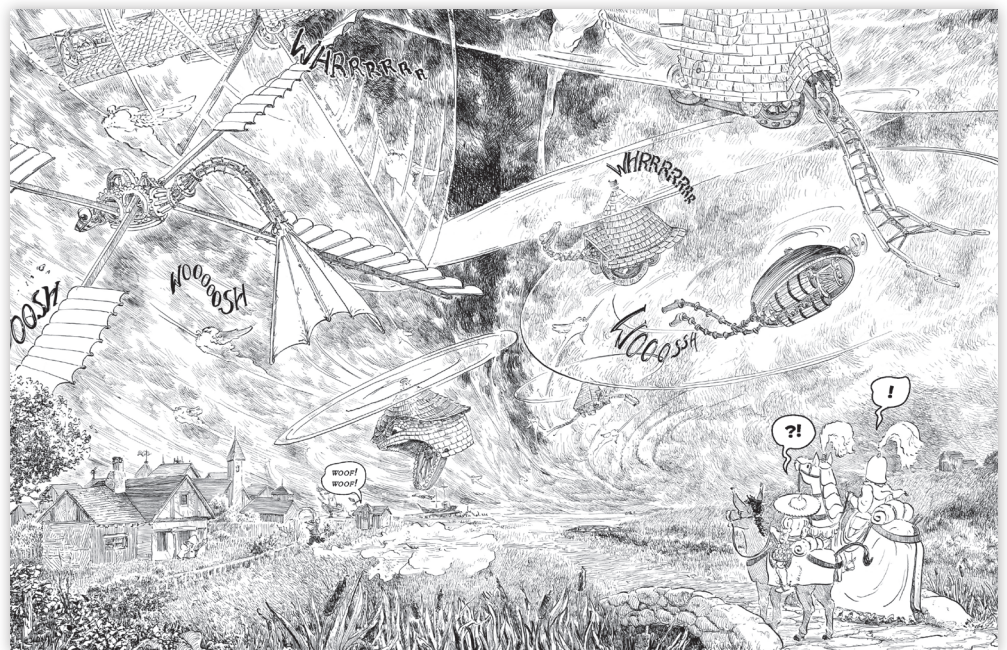
Look carefully at the artwork: it offers a subtext that at first is sensed only on a subliminal level by the reader and

encourages rereading. It creates a sense of continuity for the action, and it can tell you about the art, architecture, and clothing of a specific time period. It may present the atmosphere, landscape, and flora and fauna of another time or of another part of the world.

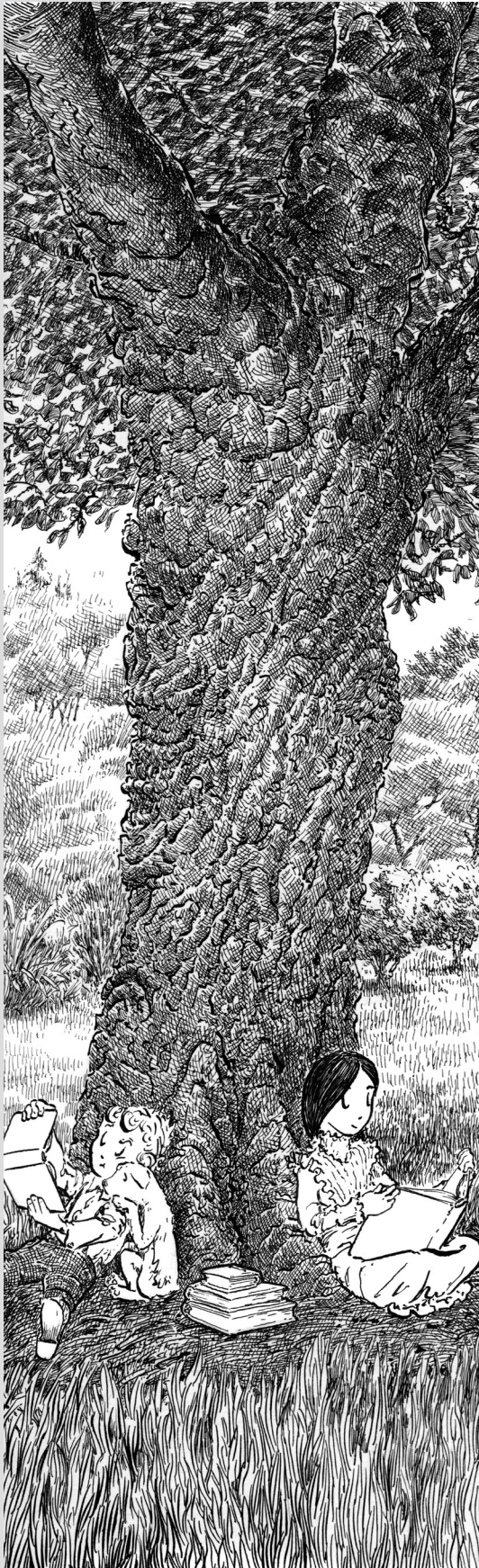
Facial expressions and body language reveal subtle aspects of characters' personalities beyond what can be expressed by words.

### READ AND REREAD!

Readers can compare comic book artists' styles and evaluate how different authors get their point across in different ways. In investigating the author's choices, a young reader begins to gain a sense of how all literary and art forms can be used to convey the author's central ideas. The world of TOON Books, TOON Graphics, and of comic book art is rich and varied. Making meaning out of reading with the aid of visuals may be the best way to become a lifelong reader, one who knows how to read for pleasure and







# LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In addition to providing students with the tools to master verbal literacy, each TOON Graphic offers a unique focus on visual learning. The 21st Century has seen a shift where literacy has been redefined to include visual literacy. Our unique lesson plans and teacher's guides help instructors and students alike develop the vocabulary and framework necessary to discuss visual expressions, structure, and meaning in the classroom.

For schools that follow the ELA Common Core, TOON Graphics lesson plans offer examples of how to best utilize our books to satisfy a full range of state standards. The Common Core's learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade, and were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. Though this book can be used in any grade, we focused this lesson plan on state standards for grades 4 and 5. Questions included in this guide fulfill the following standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Reading: Literature (RL).4-5.1-10  
Students build skills in reading and comprehending literature independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Reading: Informational Text (RI).4-5.4, 9  
Students determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. Students integrate information from several texts in order to speak knowledgeably on a subject.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.1  
Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.2  
Students summarize a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

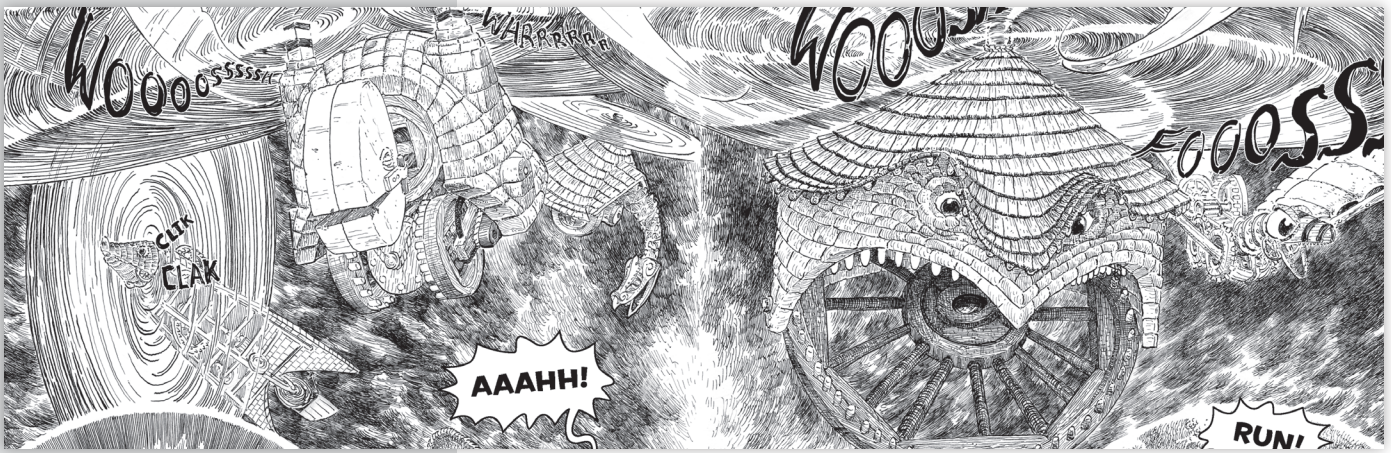
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.4  
Students report on a topic or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.1  
Students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

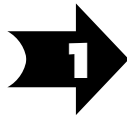
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.2  
Students write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.7  
Students conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.





- Black = potential questions for course plans
- Gray = feedback for teachers.



## Verbal Expression

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1**  
Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**  
Describe in depth a character, setting or event in a story, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**  
Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

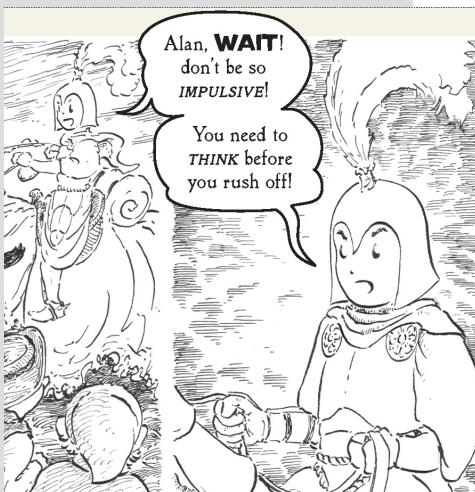
**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2**  
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3**  
Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7**  
Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text.

## Characters

- ◆ Leah and Alan are both knights, but they are very different people. However, because of their differences, they're each able to do things that the other cannot. How do each of their skill sets help in their quest?



Leah often stops Alan from rushing into danger. On page 25, she warns him about charging at the windmill dragons before they knew what was going on, and she buys two bags of meat for the Meat-eating Boat instead of just one to make sure it won't betray them (page 61). She often comes up with ideas, such as tying the ogre's toes together (pages 48-50) so they can escape with Sir George, or using the Ziz's strength to turn off the sky-faucet on page 87.

When Leah is stumped, she often chooses not to act, while Alan's impetuosity can sometimes lead to finding a solution. Sometimes trying something that seems silly is better than not doing anything at all. When Alan throwing the coin into the ocean on page 55, they meet the Meat-eating Boat and find an unexpected way to get where they need to go. When Alan calls the Ziz and asks it to put on the bridle directly on page 78, they discover the secret to controlling the creature. Alan is also very brave, and while Leah makes the plans, he's the one who can help put them into action, such as when he ties the ogre's toes together on page 47.





While both Leah and Alan are good knights, they work best as a team because their skills complement each other.

- ◆ When Pertelote's wizard owner tells Leah and Alan to find Sir George on page 41, you see a picture of him in his youth. As an old man, Sir George cannot slay dragons, or even ride a horse for very long. What makes him helpful for Leah and Alan in a way that a younger knight couldn't be?

As Leah and Alan themselves show us, there's more than one way for a knight to be useful. Because Sir George adventured so much in his youth, he has a great deal of experience and wisdom as an old man. He can help Leah and Alan figure out the cause of the windmill dragons attack even if he cannot stop the windmill dragons himself. Sir George has lived a long and legendary life which is why

the wizard says on page 41 that only Sir George could know the reason behind all the chaos.

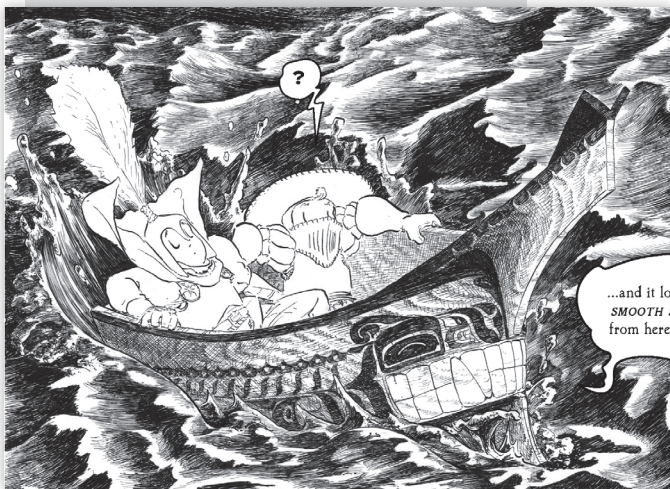


- ◆ Why does the ogre force Sir George to work for him? How does this knowledge help Leah figure out how to trick the ogre into letting Sir George escape?

The ogre makes Sir George work for him because he beat the ogre too often at cards, injuring the ogre's pride (page 45). Upon hearing that, Leah makes a plan that appeals to the ogre's pride, his weakness, in order to trick him. By praising the ogre, she flatters his ego and distracts him long enough for Alan to tie his toes together, making him trip when he tries to chase them. The fact that the ogre is so proud makes him dangerous and unpredictable, but it can also serve to make him vulnerable to Leah's cleverness.

- ◆ It's said that pets often act like their owners. How do Rosen and Arundel act like Leah and Alan?

When sending Rosen and Arundel away on page 61, Alan tells Arundel to follow Rosen because she knows the way. Rosen is the more responsible and levelheaded mount, just like Leah is often the more responsible and levelheaded sibling. Their designs also reflect their owners. Rosen is a tall and elegant steed, while Arundel is a stout but brave donkey.



## Myths and Monsters

- ◆ Many of the characters in Windmill Dragons are inhuman. What are the roles of animals, such as Pertelote, Arundel, and Rosen, as compared to the roles of monsters like the Behemoth and the ogre? What does this say about the relationship between humans and animals in this world? Between humans and monsters?

Animals tend to be helpful to Leah and Alan in the story, giving them useful tokens such as Pertelote's gifts on page 40 and loyally following their orders as Arundel and Rosen do. Even the monsters who help them must be bargained with, such as the Meat-eating Boat (page 59-62). The Ziz and the Leviathan obey Leah and Alan, but only with the help of the magical bridle given to them freely





by Pertelote. Animals and humans seem to be allies in Leah and Alan's world. While monsters might not always be enemies, they must be dealt with differently and carefully.

- ◆ When the ogre speaks to Leah while she's distracting him for Alan on pages 48-49, he speaks in rhyme. This is the only place in the book where rhyming verse is used in conversation. Why do you think the author chose to do this?

This could be a reference to fairytales like Jack and the Beanstalk or Three Billy Goats Gruff, in which monsters and heroes often speak in rhyme to each other. Of all the monsters in the book, the ogre is the most classic fairytale monster, so it makes sense for him to speak in a way that recalls such classic fairytales. It serves to increase the suspense as Leah's plan goes into action. It also shows that the ogre is becoming more invested in bragging and less aware of his situation as Alan ties his toes together.

- ◆ Fables and fairytales are stories that were often meant to preserve a moral for future generations. What do you think the moral of Windmill Dragons is?

Discuss with the class. You can bring up the effect of manmade objects on nature, such as the faucet left running too long on page 86, or point out how the windmill dragons themselves are all manmade as opposed to the Ziz, Behemoth, and Leviathan, or point out how a change in one habitat such as the Behemoth's can affect creatures everywhere. See what the students take away from the story.

## Props

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- ◆ In many fairytales, such as Baba Yaga, magical items are the key to the hero accomplishing their goal. Leah and Alan receive three items from Pertelote on page 40 which play an important role in the story; the string, the gold coin, and the bridle. How much of their success is due to the power of these items and how much is due to Leah and Alan's own bravery? If Pertelote had given these items to different heroes, would the day still be saved?

While at least one of these items is magical, it's up to Leah and Alan to decide how to use them. The piece of string is just string until it's used in the right way and the coin appears to be ordinary until Leah and Alan discover how to use it. The only item that is inherently useful is the magical bridle, and even then, Leah and Alan have to figure out how to get it on the Ziz and the Leviathan. If Pertelote had given these items to different heroes, they might have still saved the day, but Leah and Alan were the ones who figured out how to use them, and Pertelote gave the items to them because she knew that they would need them.

- ◆ The coin which Pertelote gives Leah and Alan has a scallop shell symbol on either side. This is the symbol of Saint James and is often used by pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, a medieval pilgrimage route. What might this symbolism have to do with the way the coin is used in the book?

The coin summons the Meat-eating Boat on page 55. The symbol of the scallop shell could refer to travel or quests, because pilgrims are travelers whose journey is meant to lead to enlightenment, just as Leah and Alan



are journeying to find the cause of the chaos and disruption in their world. There is other religious imagery in the book, such as the Ziz, the Leviathan, and the Behemoth, who are originally from Jewish mythology. The scallop shell is Christian, but stays in keeping with the other religious references in this fantastical world.

◆ Knights are generally imagined as heroes who easily solve problems by riding in on a white horse and slaying the monster. Leah and Alan carry swords, but the only time they use them is against the windmill dragons, and they're not effective. How does Leah and Alan's adventure differ from a typical fairytale about knights? What does this say about their role as knights?

Leah and Alan have to go find what caused the windmill dragons to appear and fix the problem peacefully. None of their problems are overcome using swords, even though in some cases they have to trick a stubborn opponent, like with the ogre on page 50. While many knights in fairytales use violence to maintain peace and order, Leah and Alan prove they can save the day without using brute force.



## Visual Expression

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7  
Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.5  
Explain major differences between poems, drama, prose, etc. Refer to the structural elements when writing or speaking about a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.4  
Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text (here, art and comics vocabulary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7  
Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5  
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, stanzas, etc. fits together to provide the overall structure of a story.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4  
Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text (here, art and comics vocabulary).

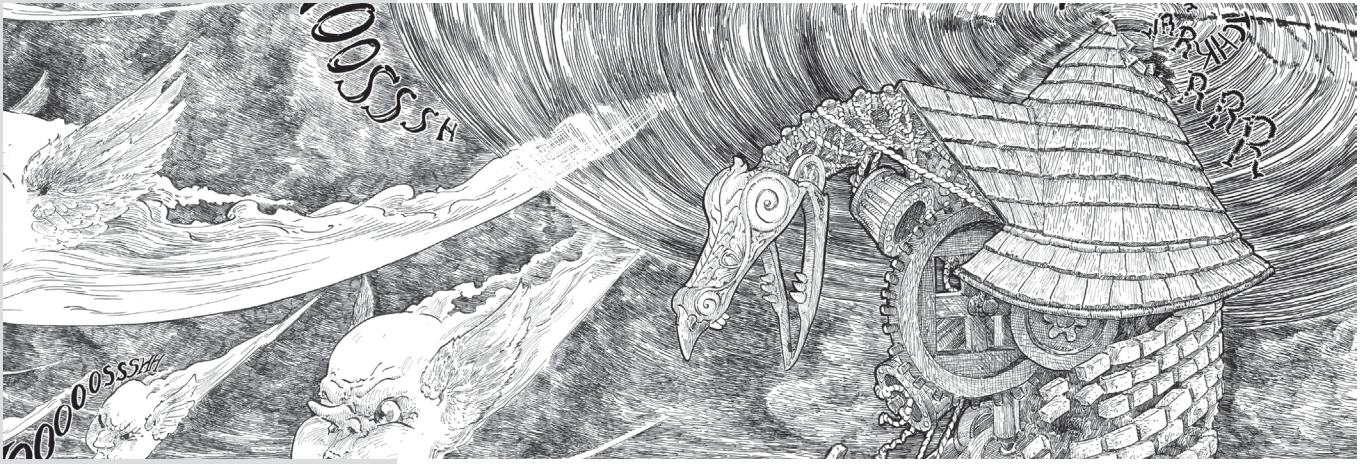


## Character Design

◆ Compared to the other characters in *Windmill Dragons*, Leah and Alan stand out. What makes them different, and why do you think the author chose to draw them this way?

Leah and Alan's forms are simpler, and their proportions are different even from the other humanoid characters. None of their clothing contains any crosshatching or shading, and instead they make a relatively blank space on the page. This gives them contrast against the heavily crosshatched backgrounds, drawing the reader's eye towards them immediately. It gives them a sense of being slightly apart from the fantastical world of the windmill dragons. The reader is reminded that, unlike the other characters in the story, they have an existence in the real world, where Leah is reading aloud to Alan. The simplicity of their design also makes them seem more open, so that the reader can relate to them and ultimately experience the adventure through them.





- ◆ The windmill dragons and the Meat-eating Boat are the only characters who appear to be manmade. How do their designs reflect their roles in the story?

The windmill dragons symbolize chaos. The fact that they are alive is something that isn't meant to happen, so their designs reflect that they should be something else. The Meat-eating Boat also serves a function to humans, so its design reflects that it is both alive and unnatural. However, its humanesque mouth and face are carved into it, unlike the windmill dragons, whose features magically appear where there was nothing before.

- ◆ In *Windmill Dragons*, there are many characters and props that aren't what they first seem to be. Name some examples and explain why the author might have chosen to make this a visual theme in the book.

Pertelote seems like a normal chicken when we see her alone on page 35, but in the next panel she turns out to be a giant. Sir George seems like a heroic young man when we see him on page 41, but turns out to be ancient when we meet him on page 44. The waterfall on page 70 turns out to be from a faucet in the sky that was left on. The recurring theme of things not being what they seem is a reference to the primary issue that Leah and Alan must solve: that the ordinary windmills in their village have turned into dragons. This theme also keeps the reader on their toes throughout the story, and helps maintain a sense of suspense.

## Composition and Space

- ◆ Look at the panels in *Windmill Dragons*. Where are they perfectly rectangular? Where do they begin to change? What's happening in the story when the panel shapes change?

The panel shapes will often begin to change during action scenes to emphasize the excitement of what's going on in the panel, then return to the rectangular layout when order is restored.

When a character is commenting on something that is happening farther away or somewhere else, the panels are often circular or partly rounded, like on pages 20-21 when the villagers are gasping at the chaos going on in the skies, on page 41, when Pertelote's master is describing Sir George and it cuts away to show Sir George as he's talking, or on page 45, where Sir George is recalling an event which happened in the past. This helps the reader understand that the action in the panels isn't necessarily happening in the same place or even simultaneously.

The last place that the panels change shape is on page 112, and in this case



it signifies a return to the real world, where Alan has fallen asleep. This is a different kind of change in setting, and the panel shapes help the reader understand that the story is over and they've returned to where they began in the first few pages.

◆ “Crosshatching” is a term which describes the effect used in the book to draw things with lots of little lines to give them volume and shape. What other uses does crosshatching have in *Windmill Dragons*?



A reader's eye will naturally follow the curve of a line. Nytra can use crosshatching to draw the reader's eye, like in the first panel on page 9, where all of the lines of grass and the shading on the clouds naturally intersect where Leah is sitting, or in the second panel on page 30, where the lines in the sky as Leah charges lead our eyes downward to where Alan is calling at a windmill dragon in the sky. Using thick crosshatching more or less heavily in one particular part of the panel can also help the reader notice something that Nytra wants us to notice, such as the silhouette of the Ziz on pages 14-15, which is much darker than everything else. Using crosshatching more lightly in the third panel on page 77, helps us distinguish that the Meat-eating Boat isn't actually there, but is being recalled in Leah's mind, as it exists on a lighter part of the page than Leah and Alan.

In comics, crosshatching can also convey a mood. On page 20, the villagers in the circular panel are shocked, and the lines shooting outwards convey the emotion they're feeling. In the last panel on page 28, Leah is disappointed in Alan, and the downward lines that get darker around her feel like a visible sign of her disappointment. This helps us understand what the character is thinking or feeling without using any words. For cartoonists, being able to convey ideas in as few words as possible is a valuable skill.



## Further Research

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-5.9  
Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.1  
Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.2  
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.3  
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.7  
Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.5  
Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

## Further Research

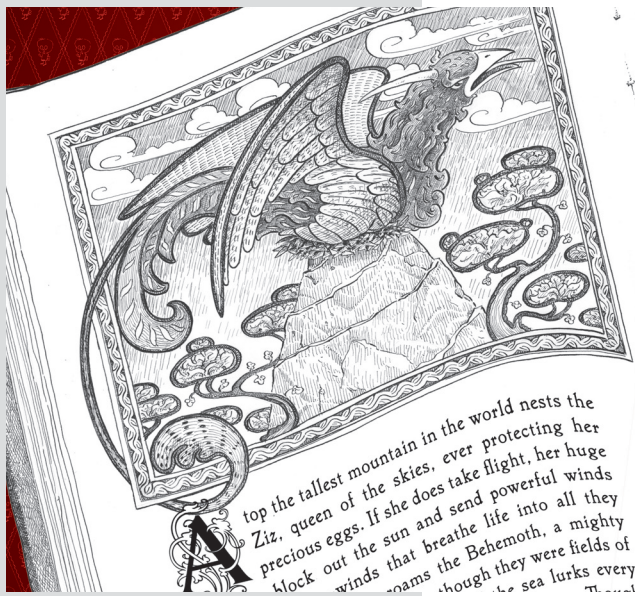
◆ In *Windmill Dragons*, the disruption of natural order leads ordinary windmills to become extraordinary monsters. However, all the parts of the dragons in the book are parts you could find in a wind-



mill. Take an everyday object and turn it into a monster. Which parts of the object serve as what parts of the monster? How can you design it so that it still retains its original aesthetic?

◆ Many of the characters in this book seem to have exploits and stories of their own. Choose a character, such as Pertelote's owner, Sir George, or the ogre, and write a short story about an adventure they had before crossing paths with Leah and Alan.

◆ This book deals with a manmade disruption of nature, the faucet left running on page 85. Ask students to make another short story or scenario where someone's negligence in the real world makes a problem that needs to be solved in Leah and Alan's world. What if someone leaves the light on and nobody can sleep because it never gets dark? What if nobody recycles and there isn't enough paper to make new books? You can let students invent their own situations or provide them with prompts.



◆ Knights have family symbols called coats of arms. Show a few examples to the class and have them design a coat of arms for Leah and Alan or themselves. Remember that coats of arms often use symbolism that reflects the knight's exploits, as well as a motto that expresses something important to that knight.

◆ Medieval books known as "bestiaries" documented real and mythical animals using beautiful illustrations and strange, often secondhand descriptions collected from travelers and ancient texts. Show the class some examples of illustrations from bestiaries online. There are many curious beasts in *Windmill Dragons* which reflect both real animals and mythical creatures. Have your students create a bestiary, either full of creatures from the story or of their own invention. Everyone should provide an illustration of their creature as well as a description of where it lives, and its habits.

