



Q & A WITH ILLUSTRATOR Matt Phelan

What initially drew you to this story about Emily Dickinson?

I liked how compact the story was and how it told of one night's adventure. I was also intrigued by how it showed both Emily's reclusive side and her less-known playful side.

How did you capture Emily Dickinson's mischievous, playful side in your illustrations?

At the start of this project, I knew very little about Emily Dickinson aside from what everyone knows about her. I took a trip to Amherst and spent some time wandering around the grounds of the house, which made up her world for the most part. Seeing the replica of her famous white dress helped a great deal, too. I could see how tall she was. Also, when compared to the "accepted" styles of dress from that time period, Emily's simple frock was clearly the more comfortable option. All of these things helped me to get a sense of Emily Dickinson as a real person, and if I can do that, I can start to draw her. Or my version of her.

Can you describe the steps you take to create your artwork?

The first step is a series of very loose sketches to work out the composition. After those sketches are approved, I draw new versions based on the sketches. The drawings are in pencil and then finished with ink and graphite "smudges" for tone.

What is one thing you learned about Emily Dickinson while illustrating this book?

I went from thinking of her as a reclusive oddball to thinking that her retreat from the world maybe wasn't so weird. I like her a lot.

What is your favorite Emily Dickinson poem?

"*Hope*" is the thing with feathers. I love the imagery of hope as a small bird, and the way she sets it against storms, the "chillest land," and the "strangest Sea." It's simple and powerful.



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