

Dear young readers,

My favorite children's book growing up was *Where the Wild Things are* by Maurice Sendack. It was through that book, I learned the power of words, meaning, and imagination. Like the main character Max, I was a wild child who wreaked havoc, and often found myself lost in these invented worlds inspired by books, popular culture, and video games. It was one of a few inspirations that lead me to become an Illustrator and educator.

As an illustrator my job is to illuminate text, which means bringing light to words in the form of an image or images. When creating a character design for imaginative stories I find it almost impossible to start drawing unless I have a word in mind that can inspire the creation of objects that are associated with it. I often research ideas from history books, the internet, or reading books from other authors, memorizing words, images, and concepts for future storytelling. They help me develop a visual library in my head that helps strengthen my imagination. Finally, I believe understanding the power of words is what makes being an illustrator unpredictably fun, and exciting.

Reading and writing are probably one of the most important skills you can have as a young person today. They're so powerful it was denied to many of our ancestors not too long ago, because our forefathers knew fully well how it's power would lead to the invention of ideas that would radically change the conditions of our people.

So, my young readers and future creatives, I hope you realize you are in a time and place where your possibilities are endless, and no one gets to experience those possibilities until you author them and share your greatness with the world. Everyone has a special story to tell, one that hasn't been told, and one people will relate to. We live in a space where you no longer need someone else's permission to write a story or share your work. While you're working towards that, continue building up your imagination. Read, write, and record everything you see and experience to help you build that visual library. You can use that visual library to relate to other people's stories or create stories of your own. Someone down the road will thank you for inspiring them.

Sincerely,

Eric T.