



Adrian Nyehart Illustration



Written and illustrated by
Adrian Nyehart

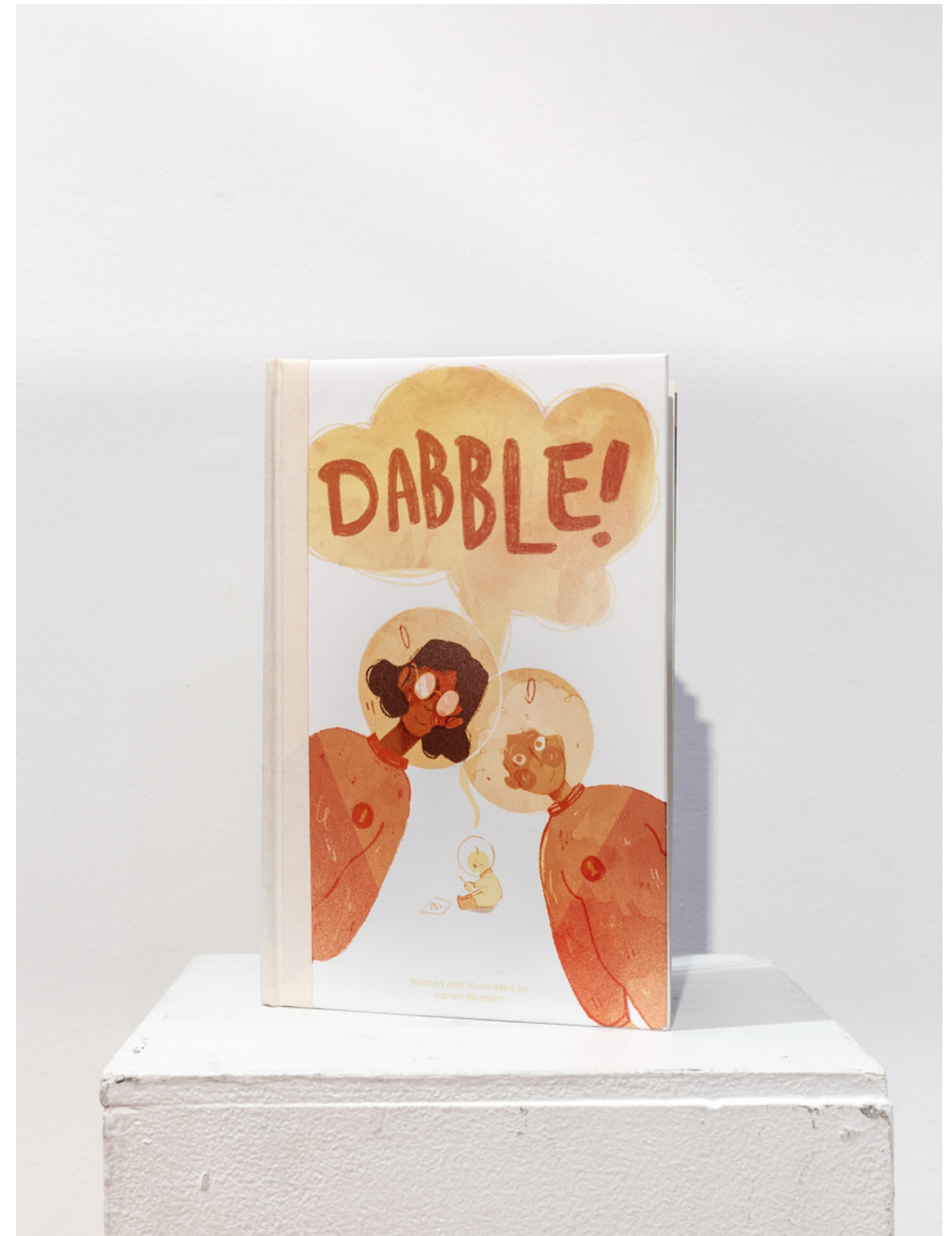
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ABSTRACT

Dabble is the story of Alma and Rose, two scientists who are only a day into retirement, and they are already bored. They look to their "How To Grow Old" books, but they're not good at golf, they knot their knitting, and they can't cook. The couple is somehow even bad at bingo. Alma and Rose are convinced that their retirement boredom will last forever. However, this quickly vanishes when an alien crash lands in front of their home, requesting their help to get back to space.

Together, the three of them put their brains together and get Dabble home, leading to the greatest adventure of their lives. Through this, Alma and Rose realize that growing old doesn't determine your interests, and that retirement doesn't have to be as boring as bingo.

Dabble has 8 finished images, and a cover. In total, the book features 19 illustrations. The work is full color and includes 3 handbuilt books.



ARTIST STATEMENT

Adrian is an illustrator born and raised in rainy Portland, Oregon. As a transgender illustrator, Adrian is captivated by the human form, which he uses to explore concepts of identity, sensitivity, and physical freedom. Adrian's interest in this is represented in his work through crisp composition, vivid color, and subtle texture.

Adrian received his BFA from Pacific Northwest College of Art Fall of 2019, and since then he's worked with clients including Future Work Design, Oregon Regional Arts and Culture Counsel, and Portland Art and Learning studio. Adrian also received the Communication Arts Award of Excellence, presented in the Spring 2019 Illustration Annual.

When he's not drawing, he loves video games, baking, and long distance running.



MIDTERM CREATIVE BRIEF

DABBLE is a picture book that enforces the idea that age does not define who a person is and that growing old should not stop you from pursuing your dreams. This project is a 32 page full color picture book dummy. Dabble is an exercise in my ability to tell a story visually. This project will be used at SCBWI conferences and publishing opportunities to show that I am serious about my craft. This project is primarily for children ages 4 – 8 years old. However, adults are considered as audience in this work as well, as they will be reading and purchasing this book. The tone for this project is lighthearted and silly. I don't want this to be a work that feel somber or serious. I also aim for the work to feel somewhat "adult", visually. I don't think the work needs to be in a children's media "style" to read as fun and lighthearted. I am visually aiming for dense, well designed images with muted a restrained color. For thesis presentation, all spreads will be printed and displayed on a wall, with a focus on 3 finished spreads. The book is primarily sketched, with all spreads in color. There will also be 1 -3 picture book dummies for the audience to look through. Post – thesis, the photographs of the work and mock – up picture book dummy will live on my website, serving as an example of my picture book and illustrative knowledge. This will be 32 page, separate ended, with a trim size of 10 x 11. For this project, my ideal publishers are Candlewick Press, Ripple Grove Press, and Chronicle Books.



WRITTEN PROPOSAL

My thesis project is a full color 32-page picture book that explores optimism and adventure in the aging process. Dabble revolves around Alma, Rose, and a little alien named Dabble. Alma and Rose are two married scientists a day into retirement, and they're both overwhelmingly bored. They look to their "How To" books, but they're not good at golf, they knit their knitting, and they can't cook. The couple is somehow even bad at bingo. They're convinced that their retirement boredom will last forever. However, this boredom quickly vanishes when an alien crash lands in their garden, requesting their help to get back home. Together the three of them put their brains together and get Drabble home, leading to the greatest adventure of their lives. In this, I am to develop a conversation about elderly characters and representation in media. While the process of aging is something that almost everyone will experience, youth is often more highly valued than advanced age. This hierarchy leads to a widespread disconnection between generations, and creates a number of harmful stereotypes. Dabble aims to challenge those stereotypes through character and setting, asserting the concept that age doesn't define who a person is. Rather, this concept is something that is perpetuated by ageism, and it fuels an ongoing societal fear of becoming "elderly". The characters drive the narrative in Drabble . Alma and Rose are a statement in themselves -- that age and gender do not define a person's personality. Alma is a 65 year old woman, and a retired mechanic. She loves getting dirty and exploring, and she is very outgoing. Rose is a retired chemist. She is soft spoken, gentle, kind, and he loves research. Both characters actively defy gender roles of the older generation, as well as stereotypes about the elderly.

In conclusion, my project is a picture book delving into the joy that can be found within the aging process. Ultimately, I want this picture book to develop my personal voice within the illustrative market, get my foot in the door within the realm of publishing, and allow me to create work that is meaningful and personal to my experience. Through Alma, Rose, and Dabble, I hope for this work to open up a healthy conversation about life, adventures, and aging.



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Hello, thank you all for coming. My name is Adrian Nyehart and I'm a final semester illustration major. The project that I'm sharing with you now is something very dear to my heart -- as it started as a homage to my grandparents, who, as I explained in thesis proposal last term, took me under their wing when I was kicked out due to my queer identity. As this project developed, it also became a nod to the queer illustrators who came before me -- and a story not only about the vast lifestyle differences within old age, but also as a tender story of age and the subtleties of queer love.

Dabble is a 11" x 7" 32-page picture book dummy that explores optimism and freedom in queer relationships and the aging process. Dabble revolves around Alma, Rose, and a little alien. In this, Alma and Rose a day into retirement, and they're both overwhelmingly bored. They look to their "How To" books, but they're not good at golf, they knot their knitting, and they can't cook. The couple is somehow even bad at bingo. They're convinced that their retirement boredom will last forever. However, this boredom quickly vanishes when an alien crash lands in front of their home, requesting their help to get back to space. The three of them put their brains together and get Dabble home, leading to the greatest adventure of their lives. The picture book dummy has 8 finished images, and a total of 18 spreads. The work is full color. To start this off, I will do a reading of my picture book dummy. While queer media in film is becoming more common, the media we're given often fall into age - old and uncomfortable tropes. Brokeback mountain, the Color Blue, Philadelphia, Soldier's Girl, and Call me by Your Name, all have one thing in common. BYG and DLS, known formally as bury your gays and Dead lesbian syndrome. Bury Your Gays is a literary trope that originated in the late 19th century, gained traction in the early 20th century, and persists in modern media. The pattern of this trope's usage states that in a narrative work, which features a same-gender romantic couple, one of the lovers must die or otherwise be destroyed by the end of the story. Many instances of this trope draw a direct correlation between the couple confessing their feelings for one another, kissing, having sex for the first time and the character's death; they often die mere moments or pages after their relationship is confirmed for the audience. The surviv-

ing lover will often go through a process of reacclimation whereby they realize that their attraction amounted to an experiment or temporary lapse in judgement—or even insanity, as homosexuality was classified as a mental illness until 1974—and they then fall into the arms of a heterosexual partner to live happily ever after and lead a "normal, straight life." While this trope is less common in picture books, we could very well claim an "educational gay book for straight parents to read to their children" trope. "My Two Moms and Me", "What does a Princess Really Look Like?" and "I'm Jazz." are all strictly informative. Specifically, most LGBTQ+ books for children younger than 13 are purely explaining "what it means" to be gay. While I think this is important in its own right, I also feel that minimizing the "otherness" in LGBTQ media is vital for children's understanding of their own gender and romantic interests. While libraries are vital to healthy and engaged readers, they contain invisible barriers that further perpetuate the divide when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community.



Picture books make up a large portion of the book market, yet queer books and characters are near non-existent. The few that do make it to the shelves are almost always challenged or banned and are near impossible to find as irrelevant and misleading subject headings are used for cataloging. I know that as a queer child I would have been ecstatic for a simple, silly, LGBTQ+ children's book. Specifically, one that focuses on a story separate from their queerness, as queer people are complex individuals, and not just an informational booklet. So instead of mindlessly searching, I decided to make one. Dabble is made for children ages 5 - 12, specifically LGBTQ and GNC children. While it's been previously mentioned that children under age 10 may not fully grasp the storyline, adults often doubt children's ability to understand complex situations, when in reality a child's life is often a complex situation. Likewise, while picture books are primarily made for children ranging in age from 3 to 8 years-old, adults write, illustrate, publish, purchase, interpret and read these books aloud. Therefore, while the 3 to 8 year-old bracket is an important aspect to recognize while considering media, it's also important to understand that this bracket is transitory stage for children on a variety of levels. Meaning, at the beginning of this spectrum you have completely illiterate toddlers, and on the opposite end you have beginning readers. In so, the interaction of media to child is often read aloud by an adult figure. In addition to the literacy transition happening in this time of a young person's life, they are also absorbing a large amount of behavioral and social cues that they will carry on with them into adulthood. Meaning, the media presented must be considered in relation to the child's absorbent mind. With these challenges considered, Dabble should be turned to as a tool for developing literacy awareness as well as moral and social behaviors. My aim

in this is to shape children's experiences, intellects, imaginations, feelings, and thoughts on multiple subjects. Something that I find vital to my thesis is the inclusion of fluid sexuality and gender, as my thesis revolves around the relationship of two elderly women. As I research, I've noted that queerness is very uncommon in children's media, as it's often coded as dangerous or purely sexual and therefore "not suitable for children". This is exceptionally true for lesbian relationships. I want to quietly reframe this I also wanted to take this opportunity to create proper elderly representation, which is uncommon in LGBTQ+ and almost nonexistent in children's media. As you flip through the book you may recognize a simple moral or message -- that growing old should not dictate the way you want to live your life. Alma and Rose are retired scientists, and the duo feel pressured to enjoy "elderly pastimes", such as golf, knitting, cooking, and bingo. In the books they read, it states clearly that being old means no more rocket science, not more astrophysics, and no more fun. They're

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not very good at the hobbies listed in their books, and they don't really seem to enjoy them. Once they're able to revisit the things they love, such as astrophysics and rocket science, the two come to an understanding that they don't have to adhere to strict book - built guidelines on how to be old, and they leave the books that prompted this idea in the first place, back on earth. Wholly, this book set up a hero's journey, but rather than focus on a young masculine character, we focus on an elderly lesbian couple. Through this I hope the concept of being oneself despite age and that age does not define interests, romantic interest, or lifestyle shows through.

Throughout my research of children's media, I continuously find inspiration in the work of Tove Jansson, creator of the Moomins. As a LGBTQ+ woman illustrating and publishing throughout the 1940's, Jansson was unable to openly speak about her identity. (Although she did once describe becoming queer as "going over the the spook side", which I found exceptionally poetic.) While there is not an open queer or lesbian relationship in her children's media, she pushes the roles of gender and ambiguous sexuality. In the world she created, Moominvalley, there are simple themes of acceptance, love, and strength. One such example is, Sorry-oo, a dog that belongs to Misabel that has what is defined as a "deep, dark secret". As Sorry - oo explains, he doesn't like dogs, but prefers cats and wishes he could be friends with one. When Moominmamma discovers his secret, she solves the problem by painting a dog with stripes, calmly accepting his need to be true to his inner nature. It's also worth noting that I was also greatly influenced by her series of "adult" novels, Fair Play. In Fair Play, Jansson develops a story about the everyday life of a queer couple. The characters in the book live as Jansson and her lifelong partner did - in adjoining apartments with connecting

studios. In this, the couple watch westerns together, try to protect their fishing nets from a storm, and bicker over the way paintings hang on the wall. My work was inspired by the tenderness and sensitivity of the read, as well as Jansson's ability to use the mundane and the everyday to allow a normalization of queerness. In my thesis, aim to utilize this method and create an open conversation about queerness that is consumable for a child. Alma and Rose Aubert, the main characters of my thesis, were also greatly influenced by the work of Arnold Stark Lobel, creator of the Frog and Toad series. During his career, he worked on dozens of children's books, both as a writer and as an illustrator. Lobel came out as gay in 1974, and passed away due to complications of AIDS in 1987. In Frog and Toad, the amphibious pair live together and explore their surroundings. Comprising of four books in total, the series tells tales of the two friends in their day to day lives. One such example is the book Frog and Toad are best friends— in which the duo do everything together. When Toad admires the flowers in Frog's garden, Frog gives him seeds to grow a garden of his own. When Toad bakes cookies, Frog helps him eat them. And when both Frog and Toad are scared, they are brave together. In the writing, there is a sensitivity of relationship that is uncommon in picture books. Frog and Toad, although not portrayed romantically, are the idyllic relationship, as they spend time together and support one another in shortcomings. While Lobel was unable to confirm the relationship of Frog and Toad, the amphibious companionship is a portrait of non-toxic, same sex, masculine love. In my thesis, which is about elderly queer identity, I aim to normalize same sex relationships. Similarly to Frog and Toad, Alma and Rose are shown living in the same

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home, being bored together, sleeping in the same bed, and closely spending time together. While I don't mention that they are a same sex couple in the text of Dabble, there is an quiet intimacy of the "everyday" within the story. This intimacy normalizes queer identity and same sex friendship and courtship. Similarly, Alma and Rose have an "opposites attract" dynamic similar to Frog and Toad. Alma is energetic and excitable, while Rose is laid back and relaxed. Through the rest of my thesis development, I would like to use Lobel as inspiration in the development of a story that isn't "about" a couple being gay, rather to gesture towards an important representation of an adult dynamic that is lacking in children's media. As part of my research, I attended an SCBWI conference. In this, I wanted to gather insight into the publishing realm and observe interactions between illustrators and authors. The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators is a nonprofit organization that acts as a network for the exchange of knowledge between writers, illustrators, editors, publishers, agents, librarians, educators, booksellers and others involved with literature for young people. I attended discussions with other illustrators, participated in a critique of illustrated work, discussed writing and illustrating, and was able to hear a speech given by Lin Oliver, founder of SCBWI as a whole. Through this process, I came to an understanding that the divide between illustrators and authors is immense. When Lin Oliver gave her first greeting, she asked how many authors were in the room. About 90% of hands went up. She then asked illustrators, and about 20 hands went up. She further divided the room by gender. The room have 5 men, including myself, and the rest were women. Lin Oliver didn't specify anyone gender nonconforming, but I was unable to see any other visibly trans person in the room. This is of course an assumption on my part, however it was clear that the vast majority of authors and illustrators were cis white

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women aged 30 and up. After this experience, I further researched this, finding that historically, picture books have been considered a "women's craft." However, statistics show that the industry is most commonly dominated by male voices, especially when it comes to awards. The picture book industry is disproportionately gendered, especially when it comes to award systems. As explained in the research done by VIDA: Children's Literature and VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, men win approximately 75% of awards, and make up almost 50% of all published work. It is also important to note that in this award system and research, there is no section included for gender non-conforming authors. The SCBWI conference made me realize that me and many other GNC, POC, queer, and anyone not cis, straight, middle aged, and white must create space for ourselves within the publishing industry. From here, I would like to further build a conversation around this gender and racial disparity and how illustrators and authors alike can express themselves within the industry. I hope to utilize it to push my work in a direction that breaks the mold of children's media as a

whole, and give a voice to minorities and otherwise oppressed people. In this project, I took the role of author - illustrator - designer - formatter - bookmaker - storyteller, which if I'm going to be honest, was a bit much. I assumed the writing aspect of this project would be minimal, but it was immense and DIFFICULT. Looking back, the manuscript and writing was probably the most difficult aspect of my thesis. Coming up with an interesting storyline and sharing that story with the world is intimidating. I found myself reworking story and making multiple iterations, which took up a lot more of more processes than expected. However, this was a really important learning experience as a whole. In the future, I would prefer to meet with an author or be given a transcript to work with, so I'm less in control of the storytelling and plot aspect.

With this, I've come to understand that my process, and the process of picture books in general, is hard to streamline. As you can see from my previous iterations, in the beginning I wanted to draw EVERYTHING. As I moved forward, I leaned more into the importance of pacing, rather than the importance of "drawing every little detail". I set myself a schedule and was able to stick to it, but the work developed up until the final week, and even now I see missed opportunities within the storytelling that I would love to revisit post graduation. I used to see these changes as a negative, but I've come to an understanding that these changes are necessary for growth as an individual and as an artist. In the future, I hope to let loose at the start of a project, and allow the work to develop naturally. In this, I've also discovered that while my brain initially think in line, as I more forward with my process I consider more shape and value as my building blocks for images. Surprisingly, this project started as everything I'm speaking against. In advanced picture book, 2 years ago, I took a public domain story called A Tale of Negative Gravity, by Frank R Stockton, rewrote and illustrated it. I created two unnamed characters, a little old man and a little old lady. I didn't give them personality outside of being old, and I stuck with a straight white couple because that's what I saw in common media. As I considered my thesis and what I wanted to represent, I decided that unnamed

characters wasn't enough. I gave the duo a name and personality, Alma and George, and I pursued my original story. At some point near my second picture book dummy, my mentor mentioned that I didn't need to follow the motifs of the public domain story. From there, I decided to pursue something more relevant to my experience, which is queer media and identity. In total, I've made 4 separate picture book dummies for this project, and I finally feel as if I'm in the right direction.

However, with anything, we're never really finished. Post graduation, I will be sending this picture book dummy to publishers in an attempt to get it published. Some publishers I have considered are Candlewick Press, Ripple Grove Press, and Chronicle books, as they often publish media similar to my aesthetic. As a picture book dummy in my portfolio, this project also shows publishers that I take my work seriously and am capable of a refined picture book. I will also be bringing this to another SCBWI conference in the spring, and putting it in the portfolio review, so agents, authors, and publishers will recognize my work. I will also be sending this to Levine Querido, which is a publisher specifically for minority voices. With this, I'd like to thank David Hohn for so gracefully accepting my many, many last minute changes, Chelsea, for dealing with me somehow making every mistake possible on the perfect binder, and Amber, for all her emotional support in this chaos, and for sitting up with me while I work until 3 am. I would also like to thank my studio mates, Cas, Katie, Lauren, and Justice, for being so supportive, and telling me it's ok to take a break. Finally, I want to thank the queer illustrators who came before me — the out, the closeted, the loud, the quiet, and everyone in between. Tove Jansson, Arnold Lobel, Maurice Sendak, James Marshall, Tomie Depeola, Margaret Wise Brown, and so, so many more. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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KIBBLE?

BIBBLE!

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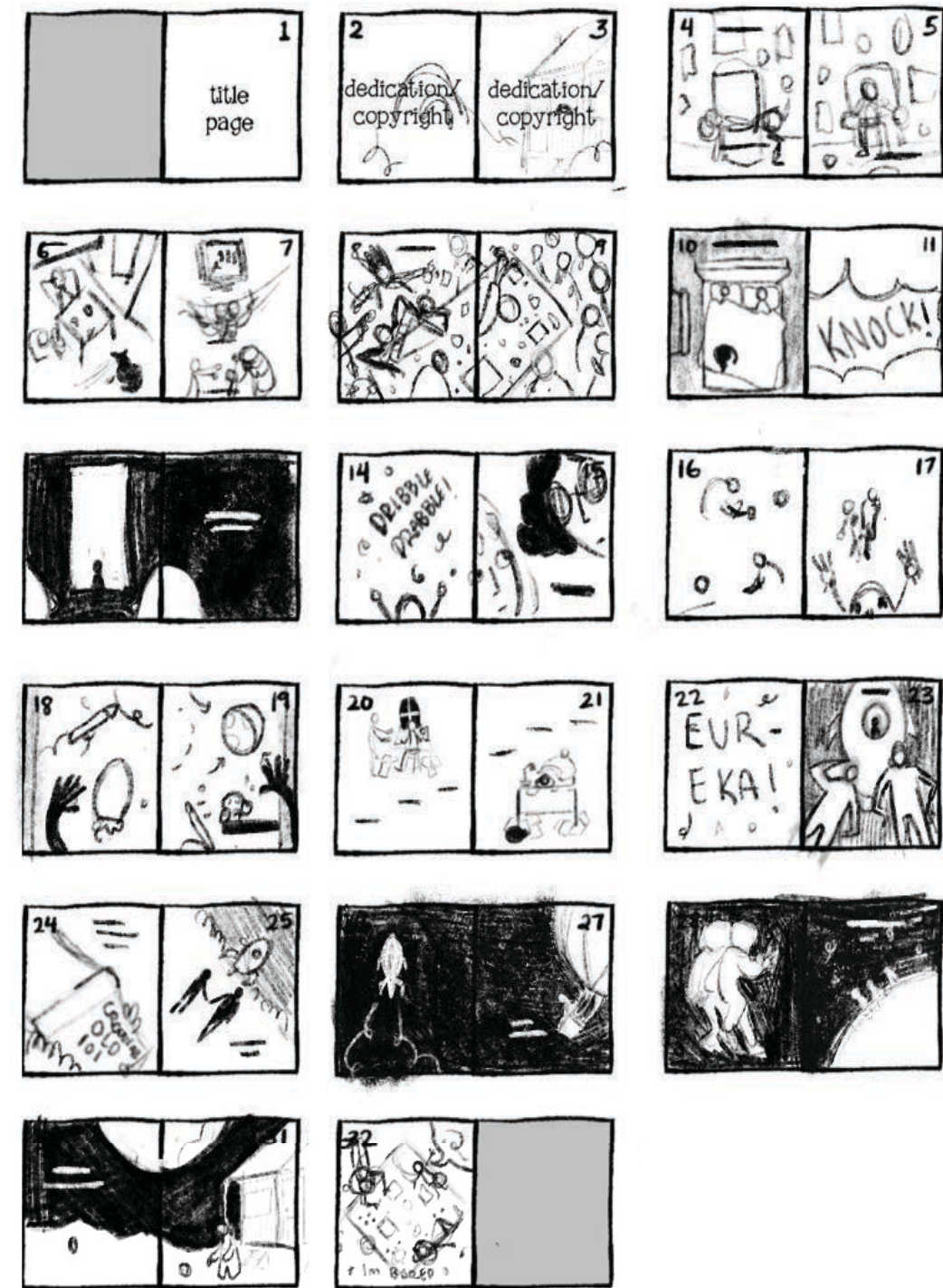
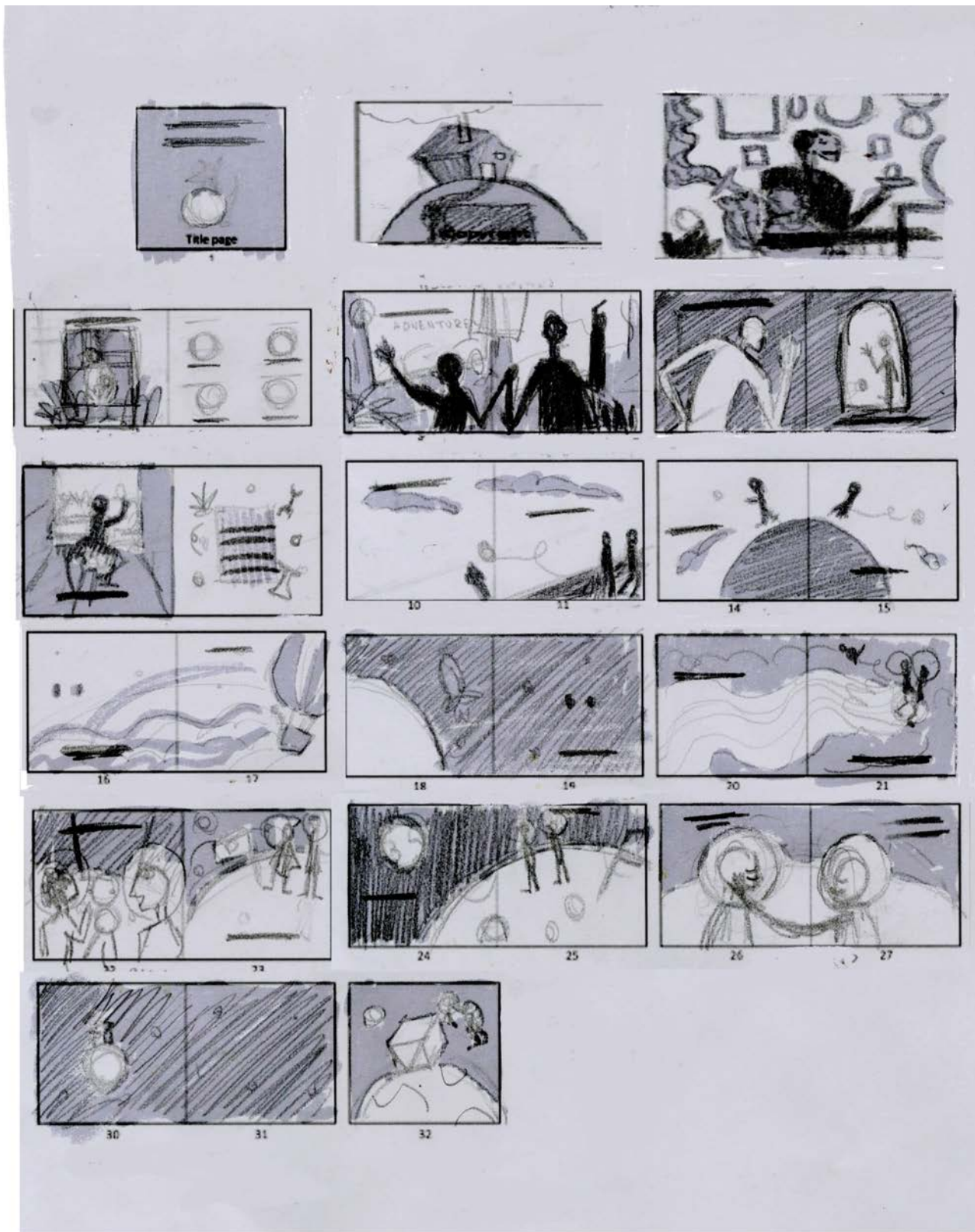
PROCESS WORK











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