



# Avery and the Fairy Circle

Rowan Kingsbury

A Graphic Novel Book Dummy

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Rowan Kingsbury



## Artist Statement

Rowan is an Illustrator based in Portland, OR, but born and raised in the rainy countryside outside of Seattle, WA. She is an illustrator, author, and maker with a passion for creating things full of wonder, warmth, and whimsy. Whether she is breaking out the paints or working digitally, she loves to make playful images of people, plants, and animals that can bring a little more beauty into the world. In her work, she tells stories that fill people with warmth and elevate mundane moments into the memorable and magical.

Rowan received her BFA in illustration from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in Fall 2021. Her past clients and exhibitions include Random House Children's Books, Nucleus Portland, Society of Illustrators Student Scholarship Competition 2020, and the PNCA 2020 + 2021 BFA Juried Exhibition.

When she isn't creating she is probably cooking up too many sweets in the kitchen, reading, or trying to find the nearest cat to bother.

# Written Proposal

I've always wanted to wander into the forest and stumble upon a fairy revel, or step into a mushroom circle and shrink down to the size of a toadstool. Eat a berry as big as my head and soar through the sky on paper thin wings. After growing up on stories of fairies, hidden worlds, and magic, how could I not?

Despite my interest, I have yet to see a fairy myself. But I do think it is important to maintain that curiosity and sense of wonder towards the world. And even without witnessing real magic, I have still found things in the forest to keep me entertained. My mom is a botanist and I was raised in the PNW, so I've gotten to know many of the plants hidden away in the mossy depths of our lovely evergreen trees. Having knowledge of botany makes it all the more exciting to walk through the woods and be able to recognize plants and see them as more than a great big wall of green. But I still wonder, what would it be like to see the forest and plants I know so well from the eyes of a fairy?

Through a 32 page graphic novel/picture book hybrid I will explore this idea. I will follow a young girl named Avery who stumbles into a fairy village while exploring the forest one day. Shrunken to the size of a blade of grass, she must get the help of a young fairy named Birch to get back home. But Birch only agrees if Avery will help her with her plant gathering duties in return. In a colorfully illustrated narrative, I will follow Avery as she experiences this fantasy world hidden just out of sight, aiding Birch for the day and learning about nature along the way. By weaving in themes of both botany and fantasy, I will tell a playful story encouraging exploration of the natural world and an interest in the plants and little things around us.

With this project I hope that I can instill the kind of awe and excitement I feel for nature and magic in anyone who reads it. I am drawing from childhood memories of summer camps hiking through the forest learning what plants we could eat or use, of crawling across huge mossy logs with my siblings pretending we were in another world, crafting little fairy homes out of hollow stumps at a local park, and the fun of food you foraged yourself. In channeling these memories, I want to embrace the specific essence of the forests we have here in the Pacific Northwest. These are the plants I have grown up learning about, the sword ferns and cedars, plantain and huckleberries. It is a fantasy brought into my own rainy backyard, a love letter to the land that I have been nourished by since I was born.



Birch led Avery confidently through the forest floor.



While based on the reality of PNW forests, I still intend for this project to be a fantastical story. By drawing on the nostalgia of older fantasy tales like Peter Pan, Thumbelina, or the works of Brian Fraud, and adapting it into the format of a comic/picture book hybrid, I will create a new story that explores botany and my childhood experiences in the PNW through the lens of fairies

My desire to make this story is a natural continuation of my lifelong passion for fairies, fantasy, and hidden worlds. A lot of my favorite picture books growing up featured fairies; such as *The Circle of Cats*, *The Wishing of Bidly Malone*, and Cicely Mary Barker's *Flower Fairy* series. I was also taken by movies like *Thumbelina* and *The Secret World of Arietty* which explore this concept of the hidden parts of the world seen through the eyes of miniature characters. I enjoy the nostalgic feeling of these classic stories that have evolved from the many different ways that fairies exist in folklore around the world. I think one of my favorite things about fairies is that, though they are founded in similar mythology, each person seems to have their own conception of what fairies are and what their worlds and ways of life look like. Take *The Spiderwick Chronicles* and compare it to *Tinkerbell*, they are both about "fairies," but the worlds are entirely different. I am excited by the idea that I can create my own interpretation of the concept of fae, maintaining the essence of the stories I grew up with but bringing it into my own magical world.

I plan to join this lineage of stories through exploring the mediums of picture books and graphic novels and where they can intersect. I am fond of both of these forms. But something clicked when I first found books like Kay O'Neill's *Tea Dragon Society*, *Nightlights* by Lorena Alvarez, or Joe Todd-Stanton's *Brownstone's Mythical Collection*. These books merged the two forms, showing the way you can bring the larger, colorful illustrations of a picture book and start to blend them with the panelling and dialogue of

a graphic novel. I find this is the ideal place for my tastes. It lets you tell longer stories with more character interaction while still allowing each page to exist as an exciting illustration in itself. While there are many picture books or novels about fairies, I want to bring my unique taste for fae into this more modern hybrid form.

In executing the illustrations I will stylize the plant imagery found in the PNW, transforming my memories of the forest into colorful, textural illustrations that whisk you away to the fairy's world. It will be familiar yet strange, seeing this setting from below rather than above, intermingled with fantasy elements. While I plan to use my digital painting skills for this project, I am intent on including natural textures as well, to evoke the nostalgia of old, hand drawn picture books and fantasy illustrations.

My goal is to make endearing characters who will guide the reader through this immersive world. Avery is a vessel for the viewer to relate to. While she originates from my memories of being a kid set loose in the forests of my home, I think of her as being representative of the child in us all. Someone any kid could see some of themselves in. As she engages and learns about the fairies as well as the forest, so do we. Birch, her fairy companion, knows the forest well and has the knowledge of both botany and the fae folk, which she imparts to Avery as they are collecting plants. She is the way through which both Avery and the reader's understanding of the world grows.

My audience is middle grade readers, though I want this to be enjoyable for anyone. It will be more complex than a picture book but not quite at the level of a YA graphic novel. This is a good age to introduce these themes, and encourage kids to not lose sight of the curiosity and taste for magic we are all born with.

This project will exist as a 32 page book brought to a traditional picture book dummy stage, where the entire book is executed in rough sketches with a handful of finished pages to show direction. I will complete the script over the summer, translate that into thumbnails, render each page in a tonal sketch, and then bring a few pages to finals. The final steps will be to format the book in indesign, inserting the final text over the images. Then I will produce the book dummy as a physical object through a service like blurb or perfect binding it myself at PNCA. I will present the final piece as a printed book, or a pdf for virtual viewing. Alongside a wall display of the entire book and any development work to show my process.

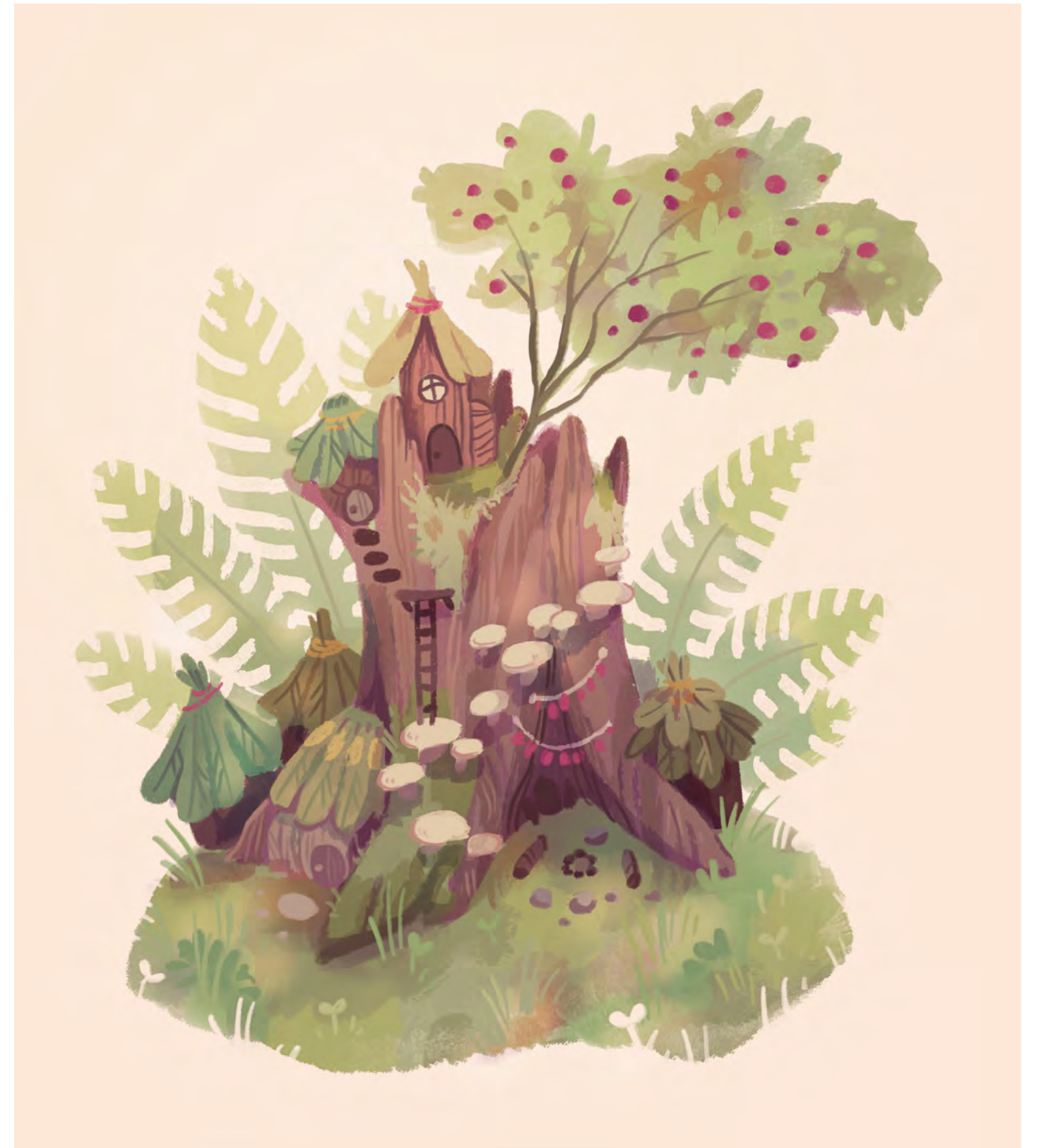
My influences in crafting this story reach back to books I've loved since I was a kid. The foundation is built on Cicely Mary Barker's flower fairy books, which were my introduction to both fairies and botany. I always think of Barker's nostalgic renderings of little fairy children and the plant life they inhabit when I go to illustrate fairies. The other books that have had a huge effect on this project are A Circle of Cats by Charles De'Lint and Charles Vess, a storybook about a girl, cats, old magic, and kindness, and The Wishing of Bidly Malone by Joy Cowley, a story of a girls run-in with a fairy revel and a fairy prince. These books are at the core of my personality, they draw from the mythology of celtic fairy tales and create original, unique stories. With themes of spirited young girls finding themselves in worlds of magic alongside charming illustrations, it is no wonder they have stuck with me and become inspirations for me to tell my own fantasy story.

The works of Kay O'Neill, Sarah Webb, and Rebecca Green have also been significant to me. Kay O'neill has an art style that is playful, colorful, and energetic which they have used to tell captivating fantasy stories through middle grade graphic novels with picture book properties to them. Sarah Webb makes comics full of texture and movement with charming characters and magical stories. And Rebecca Green's work is strikingly

shape based yet overflowing with creamy textures. Her mindset and her art inspire me to explore my mediums and push out of realism to create something unique. These three artists show me what is possible in the realm of colorful narrative illustrations.

In my years at PNCA my work has taken shape as a colorful portfolio full of characters, plants, animals, and fantasy. My mindset has evolved to value play in my work, a consistent sense of wonder, and a pursuit of elevating regular moments into the memorable and magical. Because I gather a lot of my inspiration and passion for art from books, whether picture book or novel, my work has been steadily moving towards publishing as I near graduation. I have already experimented with various forms of storytelling, but I have yet to find the time to dig into the kind of narrative illustration that I feel most drawn to, the place where comics meet picture books. With this project I will allow myself to create work in this intersection, resulting in a body of work that displays clearly my visual style and narrative taste to potential clients. It will be what I use to steer my path into the book publishing world, a functional book dummy to be shown to agents and brought to conventions as I establish my career.

This book is a culmination of many things I hold dear. It is a reservoir of childhood nostalgia, a love letter to my home, and an exploration of magic and botany. It will teach readers about the PNW forests and it will be another step in the long history of humans telling tales about fairies, keeping the tradition alive and leaving my mark on the fantasy. As I finish my time at PNCA, I am excited to show the kinds of stories I hold in me to the world, in hopes of a future full of many more books that will inspire others the way my favorite books have inspired me.



# Creative Brief

## Project Vision

Avery and the Fairy Circle is a 40 page middle grade graphic novel with picture book elements, executed in the form of a book dummy for the purpose of my thesis project. It follows a young girl named Avery, who stumbles into a magic fairy circle while on a quest to pick huckleberries in the forest. Shrunken to the size of a blade of grass, she must get the help of a young fairy named Birch to find the berries she sought and get back home. But Birch only agrees if Avery will help her with her plant gathering duties in return. As they traverse the now vast forest, they overcome their differences and find a true friend in one another, all while interacting with and learning about the plants around them.

I grew up wandering the forests of the pacific northwest in search of a sign of fairies, dreaming of eating a berry as big as my head and soaring through the sky on paper thin wings. These memories, along with the knowledge of PNW plants passed down through my mother's knowledge of botany have combined to create this story of curiosity and wonder towards nature and the magic it holds.



## Audience

My audience is middle grade readers, though I want this to be enjoyable for anyone. It is more complex than a picture book but not quite at the level of a YA graphic novel. Still using large format, colorful spreads and moments of narration. This is a good age to introduce these themes, and encourage kids to not lose sight of the taste for magic we are all born with.



## Methods and Materials

I began this project by writing and developing a working script over the summer. The book itself is 40 pages including backmatter and the title pages, with a total of 30 pages of comic. My goal has been to make endearing characters who are relatable to the middle grade audience and who will guide the reader through this immersive world, learning along with us about the real, useful plants around them. In executing this project visually, I am stylizing the plant imagery found in the PNW, transforming my memories of the forest into colorful, textural illustrations that whisk you away to the fairy world. It is familiar yet strange, seeing this setting from below rather than above, intermingled with fantasy elements. I am completing the rough sketches and finished pages in procreate within my contemporary style of cartoony and cutesy characters. But I intend to use natural textures in the rendered illustrations to evoke the nostalgia of old, hand drawn picture books and fantasy illustrations. The final project will be exported from indesign as a fully readable book dummy consisting largely of sketched and toned pages with 4-5 finished pages to show the style.

## Comparative Media

While my approach is leaning a smidge more towards picture books, this project is similar in form to many large format middle grade graphic novels available today. These works include Kay O'neill's Tea Dragon Society, Nightlights by Lorena Alvarez, Joe Todd-Stanton's Brownstone's Mythical Collection, and The Sprite and the Gardener by Rii Abrego and Joe Whitt. All of these books are around 8.5x11" or more and contain full color, cutely stylized illustrations in a variety of comic and picture book techniques. I imagine Avery and the Fairy Circle would fit nicely on the shelf next to any of them.

## Marketplace Application

The application of this book for me is as a way to pitch to literary agents and then publishers. It is proof of my ability to complete a longer form story and it displays clearly my visual style and narrative taste to potential clients. It will be what I use to steer my path into the book publishing world, a functional book dummy to be shown to agents and brought to conventions as I establish my career.



# Abstract

Avery and the Fairy Circle is a 40 page middle grade graphic novel with picture book elements. Set in the Pacific Northwest, the story follows a young girl named Avery, who stumbles into a magic fairy circle while on a quest to pick huckleberries in the forest one day. Shrunken by the circle to the size of a blade of grass, she must get the help of a young fairy named Birch to find the berries she sought and get back home. But Birch is on a quest of her own and she only agrees if Avery will help her with her plant gathering duties in return.

A fantastical and educational journey of friendship, magic, and botany follows as they traverse the now vast forest together. They overcome their differences and find a true friend in one another, all while interacting with and learning about the plants around them.

Avery and the Fairy circle has 30 pages of comic with 4 and a half finished pages and a completed cover. The rest of the book is rendered in toned sketches with 3 pages of educational backmatter. The work includes 2 handbuilt books and is made to be pitched to agents and publishers as a completed book dummy.



# Oral Defense

Hello everyone, and thank you so much for coming to my presentation today! My name is Rowan Kingsbury and I'm an Illustration major here at PNCA.

My project, *Avery and the Fairy Circle*, is a 40 page graphic novel with picture book elements, executed in the form of a book dummy. The story follows a young girl named Avery, who stumbles into a magic fairy circle while out on a quest to pick huckleberries in the forest one day. Shrunken by the circle to the size of a blade of grass, she must get the help of a young fairy named Birch to find the berries she sought and get back home. But Birch is on a quest of her own, and she only agrees if Avery will help her with her plant gathering duties in return.

Together, they traverse the now vast forest, overcoming their differences and finding a true friend in one another. All while interacting with and learning about the plants around them. They climb logs to collect licorice root, bond over their shared knowledge of salmonberries, and carefully navigate a patch of stinging nettles. And with their harvest they return to Birch's village for a celebration of the solstice full of food, dancing, and community.

When I was growing up, I was lucky enough to have the forests of the Pacific Northwest at my fingertips, and I would often look for signs of fairies in the hidden crevices of its mossy logs.

The stories I was told as a kid had me dreaming of soaring through the sky on paper thin wings, and eating berries as big as my head. Having tea parties with an acorn teapot and living in a little house made of twigs and moss.

These memories, along with an interest in the plants of the Pacific Northwest, passed down through my mother's knowledge of botany, have combined to create this story of friendship, curiosity, and wonder towards nature and the magic it holds.

I knew at the start of my thesis year that I wanted to create a story of some kind. Something heartfelt, cozy, and magical. I am used to my role as an illustrator, but the role of author, and even an educator of sorts, was somewhat new to me. But following my passions quickly led me to the intersection of storytelling, illustrated narratives, fairies, and spreading knowledge of botany. So I asked myself, how can I explore botany and my childhood experiences in the pacific northwest forests through the lens of fantasy? How can I translate that into a colorful hybrid of graphic novel and picture book elements? How can I tell a story and send an educational message simultaneously, and how can I summarize the skills I've gained at PNCA to create something that reflects the work I want to be doing? These questions came together to create the initial concept for *Avery and the Fairy Circle*.



The primary foundation for this story comes from my childhood experiences. This is where I drew much of my inspiration for imagery and narrative moments from and what drove my emotional connection to the project. The setting is largely based on my hometown, Duvall Washington. As I wrote in the first line of the book, it is built on “a rolling valley surrounded by hills of evergreens.” With this as the backdrop, I knew I could maintain a level of connection to reality that would make the book feel real and tangible even with it’s fantasy elements. Though most of it takes place deep in the forest, it is my familiarity with the particular forests of Washington that make it unique to other fairy stories, and which inspired the specific plants that the characters get to discover.

Where I was first encouraged to connect with nature was when I regularly attended a week-long summer camp called Wilderness Awareness school just outside of Duvall. Here I would explore the forest with a group of other kids and a mentor. I learned about different plants and animals, how to build shelter out of sword ferns and branches, and make fire without matches. Those summers are when I started seeking out red huckleberries just like Avery. They were my favorite snack whenever we passed them hiking through the forest, and I would collect as many as I could. I still keep an eye out for their charming round leaves and little berries whenever I find myself in the forest in the summer. This is also the origin of the stinging nettles I included. I recall the itchy sting I would get whenever I strayed into a patch of nettles on a hike all too well.

It was this camp and what I learned there about the bountiful resources of the forest that influenced how I designed the fairies in my story. I wanted a fantasy that was a bit more grounded, so the fairies are magic but they also live in harmony with their forest home. Building their houses like nests out of scavenged materials and harvesting the berries and roots as if the forest were their garden.

Outside of summer camps I would still be immersed in the plants that Avery’s story explores. I often went to local parks with my dad and siblings to chew on licorice fern root and build fairy houses out of daisies and bark chips. And I spent lots of time absorbing knowledge from my mom as we nibbled on garden plants, made tea, or visited the university where she taught botanical medicine and wandered barefoot through their plant-filled gardens.

I’m grateful I was taught these things at a young age so that I could put a name to what I saw in the forest. This is how the story I wrote became educational as well as fantastical, to share that knowledge with others. Early in the process I began rummaging through my Mom’s plant guides, in particular the Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast by Jim Pojar and Andy Mackinnon, to narrow down which plants to include. While Avery is in the world of fairies, all of the plants she encounters are from reality, and a goal of my thesis is to give readers enough information to be curious and seek them out in the real world.

Influential in this part of the process was the book Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer which I started listening to in the proposal stage. She discusses many things, reflecting on a blend of indigenous and scientific knowledge that is deeply moving and complex. But the importance of maintaining a relationship with the rest of the living world stuck out to me in particular. This was something that could be brought into children’s media through the story I was working on; where the miniature fairy setting allowed me to get up close and personal with a selection of the plants that could be found just outside my front door.

Another area I explored with this project was how I could interpret the classic fairy and folktales I grew up on into a more modern setting. I



Avery lived in a rolling valley surrounded by hills of evergreens.

In the summertime she enjoyed exploring the woods, and today she was heading out on a quest!



wanted my story to feel like a meld of nostalgic and contemporary styles that could be easily understood by kids today but held true to my influences. It was stories like Peter Pan and Thumbelina that laid the groundwork for my interest in fairies and storytelling. As well as my favorite picture books, *The Circle of Cats* and *The Wishing of Bidly Malone*. These stories all feature the classic storytelling narration that many old books have, as well as a variety of interpretations of what fairies are and what their worlds look like. From little fairy villages glowing in fields for one night only to fairies that can only be seen out of the corner of your eye, sparkling in the air. This was my chance to see what kind of fairies I could make, and how my story could find its place amongst a long lineage of fairy tales.

With this as the groundwork, I reflected on the more modern examples of media that could influence my work. Alongside my interest in picture books, I am very passionate about graphic novels. Most of my inspirations for the concept of Avery's story came from the written word or picture book form of my nostalgic influences, but the visual style I chose was based on the graphic novels that have kept my interest in art alive. This is what brought my story out of nostalgia and into the contemporary world.

The works that I looked at during this process were those of Kay O'Neill, the creator of the *Tea Dragon* series, as well as *The Sprite* and *the Gardener* by Rii Abrego and Joe Whitt, *Nightlights* by Lorena Alvarez, and Joe Todd-Stanton's *Brownstone's Mythical Collection*. These books are mostly within the realm of middle grade graphic novels. But what drew me to them in particular was their large format, full color, and almost picture book-esqu approach to their illustrated narratives. They utilize big panels, illustrated spreads, and shorter story lengths to tell colorful and exciting narratives fit for younger readers. This made me ask

the question of how I could blend comic work with picture book elements.

It is a somewhat uncharted territory, with only a few examples that came near what I was thinking. Other than Joe Todd-Stanton's work, which would be considered a picture book with more narration than speech, the rest of my examples sat fairly comfortably as comics. What I wanted to create was something of a shorter length that relied on some larger spreads and narration, but still held dialogue and panels to allow the story to be more complex and show Avery and Birch's interactions clearly. My approach became to treat the narration as you would in a classic movie; where moments of the narrator speaking would occur largely between scenes as if they were reading a storybook to you as you imagined it.

The visual style of Avery and The Fairy Circle is the culmination of my years at PNCA. With the help of my professors I have honed in on my interests and what processes work best for me. I love to create brightly colorful illustrations full of roundness and whimsical flourishes. This story is stylized and cutesy in the way I like to work in order to fit its audience of middle grade readers, but its setting is specific enough that I was careful to stylize the forest and fairies in a way that was recognizable and felt fitting. The end result was made almost entirely digitally using Procreate, but my choices in brushes and textures were deliberate to give it a tangible feel and reference how traditional painting has influenced me.

The visual development for Avery and Birch as well as the fairy village involved a lot of thinking back to my childhood clothing choices and a Pinterest board full of mossy stumps, bird nests, and fairy houses. The entire book is meant to be cute but also a very natural approach to fairies. While I love a pristine and pink fairy story, I was also the kind

of kid to make mud pies and weird concoctions out of plants in my backyard, and I wanted that to reflect in Avery and Birch. As well as this, I wanted to make sure their personalities were apparent in the way they looked.

Avery's design is casual and comfortable, reflecting her practical nature. Her bright coral jacket is reminiscent of a short sleeved hoodie that I lost when I was a kid, and makes her stand out on the page, the same color as the huckleberries. And the tear in her leggings shows she is adventurous despite her sensible nature.

Birch is the wild contrast to Avery. With untameable hair, loose, leafy pants, and not a shoe in sight. I wanted her look to be fairly androgynous for a fairy because she isn't the sort to be concerned with looking cute or feminine. And I didn't give her anything to restrict her freedom of movement other than the cumbersome basket her parents made her carry.

For the village, I designed it around the way huckleberry bushes like to grow out of mossy old stumps. I wanted the houses to look like they were a natural part of the forest while still being fantastical. My inspiration came from the way birds weave nests together as well as the silhouettes of mushrooms and a combination of quaint cottages and weirdly smooth and round eco homes. I kept the colors tame to reflect the materials available to the fairies, but was sure to decorate with bits of pink and red to give it a certain festiveness.

I also put consideration into Birch's family, inspired by my own big family since I have three siblings. I gave each of Birch's siblings and parents their own personalities and outfits, but I wanted to make them look unified with a generally matching color scheme that could be recognized

amongst the rest of the village. They all wear yellow and green with a repeating leafy pattern that I based off of Birch's outfit. And it was fun to design their diverse silhouettes, as they are all different ages and heights. Her moms specifically were given two somewhat opposing designs to play off their dynamic. With mom, the grumpier one being shorter and sturdier, giving off a very grounded personality. And mama, the friendly one, having a very tall, inviting, and graceful silhouette.

As well as this, her family is a reflection of my queer identity. This book isn't focused on queer themes, but it was important to me to include that aspect of myself. Which is what made me choose to give Birch two moms, something I would have loved to see in my childhood stories. Children's books lay the foundation for what is normal in a child's eyes, after all, and I take that responsibility seriously.

With all of these considerations, I came to the book you see here. But now let's talk about how I actually got there.



If you attended my proposal, you can see that Avery and the Fairy Circle didn't shift all that drastically from what I initially proposed. But it was a journey to execute and refine it, and I had to make adjustments along the way to make it just right.

Before my proposal I did a lot of reflecting and revisited the works that were my influences, thinking about what made them so exciting to me. Being in my hometown helped as well, since I could explore the locations I was inspired by in person. I went on many walks and took pictures of trees and ferns and little plants to use as references. By the end of my first semester I had a general outline and visual development, but after my proposal it was time to narrow down and start making the story concrete.

I was lucky to have the entirety of the summer to write my script. It gave me time to allow the story to evolve and grow with the help of my first mentor, Meg Hunt. In my initial outline the story was a bit different. I had it set at night up until my proposal, and Avery initially wandered into the forest very passively, without a clear motive. She then found herself in the fairy village almost immediately before setting off with Birch to gather plants, which took a lot of the impact out of that reveal. A lot of story moments stayed the same, but I knew it needed work to make it satisfying.

I spent my first few weeks clarifying Avery and Birch's motives through character studies, and investigating how I could improve the story structure. Questions provided by Meg helped a lot here and aided in seeing the holes in my development work. She asked me things like, "what are the character's parents like?" "Did Avery know the forest well?" "Does Avery have any close friends?" "What bugs Birch the most?"

And what impresses her?” We also delved into how the two benefit each other, what type of community the fairy world was, and what specific activities fairies do during their festival. What was once blurry began to sharpen into focus as I was forced to put pen to paper.

While much of their backstories aren't featured in the final script, I began to understand Avery and Birch more as I reflected on what brought them to this point in the story, what their relationships were, and what they wanted or needed. Avery became a kid who is adventurous, curious, and smart, yet cautious and sometimes unsure. Raised to be responsible, she is one to think carefully before acting. She's also an only child in a quiet neighborhood, so she is somewhat lonely and in need of a friend. Birch is tricky and self-centered, yet charming. Curious and mercurial, she is fairly high energy and known to be a bit of a troublemaker, albeit endearingly. As the middle child of a large family however, she feels lonely too, lost amongst her siblings. She is facing growing up and having responsibilities, and doesn't love it. She just wants to hold onto that carefree fun of childhood.

When they meet, they find themselves helping each other grow and their goals change. The story became more focused on their journey of understanding each other. Avery initially just wants to find huckleberries and get home, but soon learns more about the forest she loves and how to stand up for herself and loosen up a bit. And in Birch she finds the friendship and community she was missing. Birch starts out immature and unhappy about the responsibilities put upon her. But she discovers the importance of being considerate of others and that responsibilities can be a lot of fun when you're sharing them with a friend. Once I knew my characters well, I began to know what kind of story they needed.

The process of refining the story outline involved the tough decision of just what amount of graphic novel and picture book elements I wanted

to include. My choice would affect the complexity of the story and the formatting, so the decision had to be made. With this in mind I made two outlines based off of my initial story development. The first was a beat sheet in the style of a graphic novel script process. In this draft I gave the story a lot more complexity, as you would expect from a proper graphic novel. Avery's home life was shown a bit more, she had just moved to the town and her parents were being inattentive, distracted by the move. She follows a butterfly into the woods and proceeds to go on her journey with Birch, but with more exposition and conversation that provided more detail but lost the charm and playfulness of a picture book.

The second outline was deliberately more picture book inspired and notably included a narrator that told the story to the reader in between dialogue driven scenes. I drew out a quick test page for each and brought these two versions to Meg, as well as my friends, and asked everyone to share their thoughts. In the end, both versions had strengths to them, but the feedback showed me that the picture book inspired version had more of the storybook feel to it that I originally intended, while still allowing me to include comic elements. This, along with the slightly smaller page count and easier execution, led me to settle on the second outline.

With the direction chosen, I worked with Meg to flesh out the story in preparation for the script. This is when we solidified the actions of Avery and Birch to show their growth through the three part journey of gathering the plants. When they are gathering licorice ferns we made it clear that Birch was not considering Avery's needs, and that Avery was unsure about Birch's wild energy. Then, with the salmon berries, we show Avery's problem solving as she uses a nearby leaf to glide over to the bush. This is also where she confronts Birch for running off without her, and they come to an understanding that strengthens their friendship.

After this they begin to have more light hearted moments, and Birch starts to take Avery into consideration as she helps her back down to the ground. With the stinging nettles, they are now working as a unit to harvest the plants, and Birch is excited to share with Avery the things her mom taught her about them. It was important that through this journey, they are fully comfortable around each other by the time they get to the village, so that Avery could be quickly embraced by the fairy community.

Towards the middle of the summer I was wrapping up my final script which showed the narration, dialogue, and proposed panel descriptions all in one document. During this process I needed only to refine the story a bit more to emphasize the two girl's character growth and plotlines; adding scenes like the girls helping make the potion with Birch's family to further incorporate the botanical themes, and carry the plot of Avery returning home with more ease. Then it was time to make a bookmap, using indesign to make panel layouts and then putting the script over them. This allowed the story to be seen clearly in its proper format. It was at this point that Meg had to step down and Molly took over as my mentor. It was actually lovely getting fresh eyes on my project and working with both of them was a great opportunity.

Because I was essentially doing two jobs, writing and illustrating, I was lucky to be able to have a pre-midterm review at the end of August as well where I got even more feedback on my completed bookmap, before moving on to executing the comic. I met with David Hohn, Zachary Clemente, and Shannon Wright in this initial review and overall the feedback was good. The main thing that we talked about was the narration I was including. This sparked a discussion that bled through to my midterm review as well and became a significant thing to consider in this project. The feedback was that the narration was getting lost or was over explaining the planned visuals, and became unnecessary in places. We





discussed various ways that the format could be altered to make it clearer, and which parts of it could be removed. But it was hard to edit it without any visuals to compare it against yet. So I made changes where I could, increasing the text size and beginning to whittle away at the extraneous lines of narration, and began the thumbnails so I could better revise the book as a whole.

This wasn't the end of the discussion, however, and at my midterm review with Meg, Zachary, and Jonathan Hill it was brought up again. There were a few more areas where it wasn't working and we talked about how the book could exist without it and what publishers might think. It was a matter of either sticking to the "show don't tell" motto of comics or giving something to read out loud to ease the younger audiences into the more complex format. This is a book that I picture being accessible to reading independently or out loud which is unique for a graphic novel. So I decided that it was important to me to maintain the narration as a proof of concept and an important element of the storybook nature of my project. It was helpful to consider though and encouraged me to improve upon it to make sure it was working throughout the book. Depending on who I market it to it is possible the format will change but I'm happy to have an example of the story as I meant to tell it.

Aside from this the sketches went relatively smoothly after putting so much thought and preparation into the beginning of the project. My regular meetings with Molly helped make sure it was reading well and I maintained a consistent back and forth doing edits as well as new pages each week to refine and put the book together as I went. Through this, my approach to comics evolved as I gained more experience and we improved upon my layouts to follow the emotional beats of the story, and maintain the balance of a graphic novel that feels like a picture book.

Early in the thumbnails, Molly and I discussed treating some of the panels like spot illustrations, removing their borders and leaving the figures on white backgrounds. This began on pages 6 and 7 and was a stylistic choice I continued throughout. Because my style is so lush and brightly colored, these moments allowed the pages to breathe and the focus to be on the silhouettes of Birch and Avery interacting.

On the other hand, we also chose moments to zoom in on the characters and focus on their hands and actions, such as on pages 9 and 15. These moments served to imply the mood of friendship and closeness growing between the characters. It is not a typical picture book approach, as usually you avoid cropping the main characters in that format. But it draws from graphic novel styles to slow down a scene and sit with an action longer.

The rest of the book follows suit in melding these styles, some pages containing more panels, others focusing on larger ones and even fully illustrated spreads. I utilized the comparable media I had on my bookshelf as well as test prints to make sure the size of the illustrations and text would read well on a real page. It was a challenge sometimes to know how much I could fit on a comic page of a larger format, but also very exciting to have so much space to work with.

Something particularly valuable in this part of the process was learning what is realistic to expect from myself in a given timeframe when it comes to comics. I went in being careful not to overcommit, after spending most of my time at PNCA with a repetitive strain injury in my arm, and I had some weeks where I struggled to maintain pace. But I managed to meet the deadlines I set for myself without injury and it was good practice for the real thing. Now I have a basis for what I can tell clients when executing professional comic projects.

The final result is the book dummy you see before you. I am really excited to have a full length story that can be read all the way through. This is the first long comic I've worked on and I'm proud of what I accomplished. However, while I learned a lot on this project, this is only one stage of its existence. It has room for improvement and evolution as I seek to get it properly published.

The way I envision this work existing in the real world is as a digital and physical book dummy ready to be pitched to literary agents and then publishers. It is proof of my ability to write and illustrate, and an example of my visual style and narrative tastes. I think it could fit in with publishers like Nobrow, First Second, and Flying Eye, though my first priority is to get representation so I can tackle the complexities of publishing confidently.

This project will be what I use to steer my path into the book publishing world, and if I'm lucky it will be picked up and the next stage of its existence will start. I can envision it becoming longer and more in depth or being pushed towards graphic novel or picture book markets, and changing accordingly. The story could even evolve or sequels could happen. This is why I left it as a book dummy with mostly rough sketches, so that it is ready to be molded with more time and care after I graduate and with the help of an editor. This is only the beginning for this book but I will say that I'm happy to have made a version that is as true to myself as possible.

A lot of love went into this. All the times I helped my mom make tea from our shelves full of herbs, crawled through sword ferns with my siblings, goofed off with friends, and sat quietly in the forested ravine by my house just listening to the noises of the stream. All the graphic novels on my bookshelf that left me with a hunger to make something of my own, and all the stories of fairy revels and pixie dust.

I did what I set out to do, melding the things that were most important and exciting to me into a real, actual book that I can hold in my hands. It shows what made me, what I've learned, and where I'm headed, and I can't wait to see what happens next.

With that I would like to thank Molly and Meg for supporting me through this and making sure I was always pushing to improve this project as I went, I was really lucky to get both of your expertise just when I needed it. I also want to thank my parents for teaching me about plants, reading me books, and never hesitating to encourage my obsession with art, my siblings for being my designated forest exploration partners, my friends for always hyping me up, and all my teachers at PNCA for helping me grow over the years. I hope one day this project reaches kids and encourages them to take a closer look at the forest, and maybe find some fairies of their own. Thank you!



# Thesis Defense Documentation







FA21 | Rowan Kingsbury | Avery and the Fairy Circle | Illustration





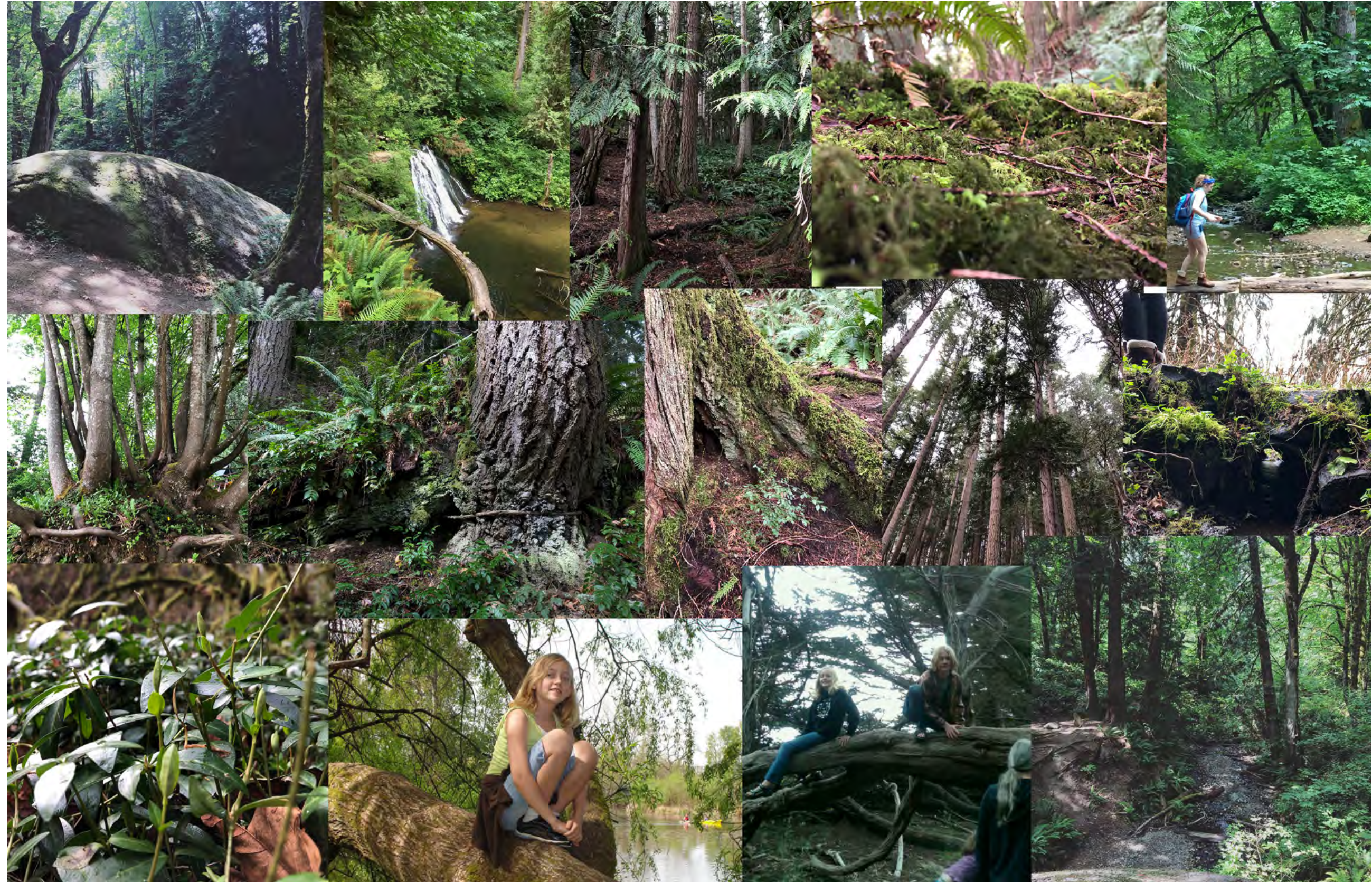








# Thesis Journal





Ideas + stories + concepts:

- Narrative combining the discovery of hidden fair worlds w/ mindfulness?
- Animal characters participating in things I am grateful for.
- Little mindful poems w/ illustrations.
- Fairy / creature guide book?
- some excuse to make a plush / gift kit?
- A narrative about a girl meeting a fairy. Celtic myth, moth rider universe. (looks to scriptwriting ideation) Gratitude?

Style + Visual language + Tone

Fantastical, cute, middle grade / YA, like a warm cup of tea.

Cozy, heartfelt, magical.

Illustrative + character centric, stepping out of the rigidity of comics.

Content:

- Fairies
- Animals
- Nature/plants
- Characters
- Food
- Little Things
- Romance
- Magic / hidden worlds
- Everyday moments
- Gratitude

• cute? • Nostalgia • LGBT

Animals or fairies as the characters?  
 Animal characters telling a story of fairies in place of humans?  
 A narrative of gratitude.

"SERENDIPITY"

FOCUS?

- Fairies
- Animals
- little things
- Gratitude



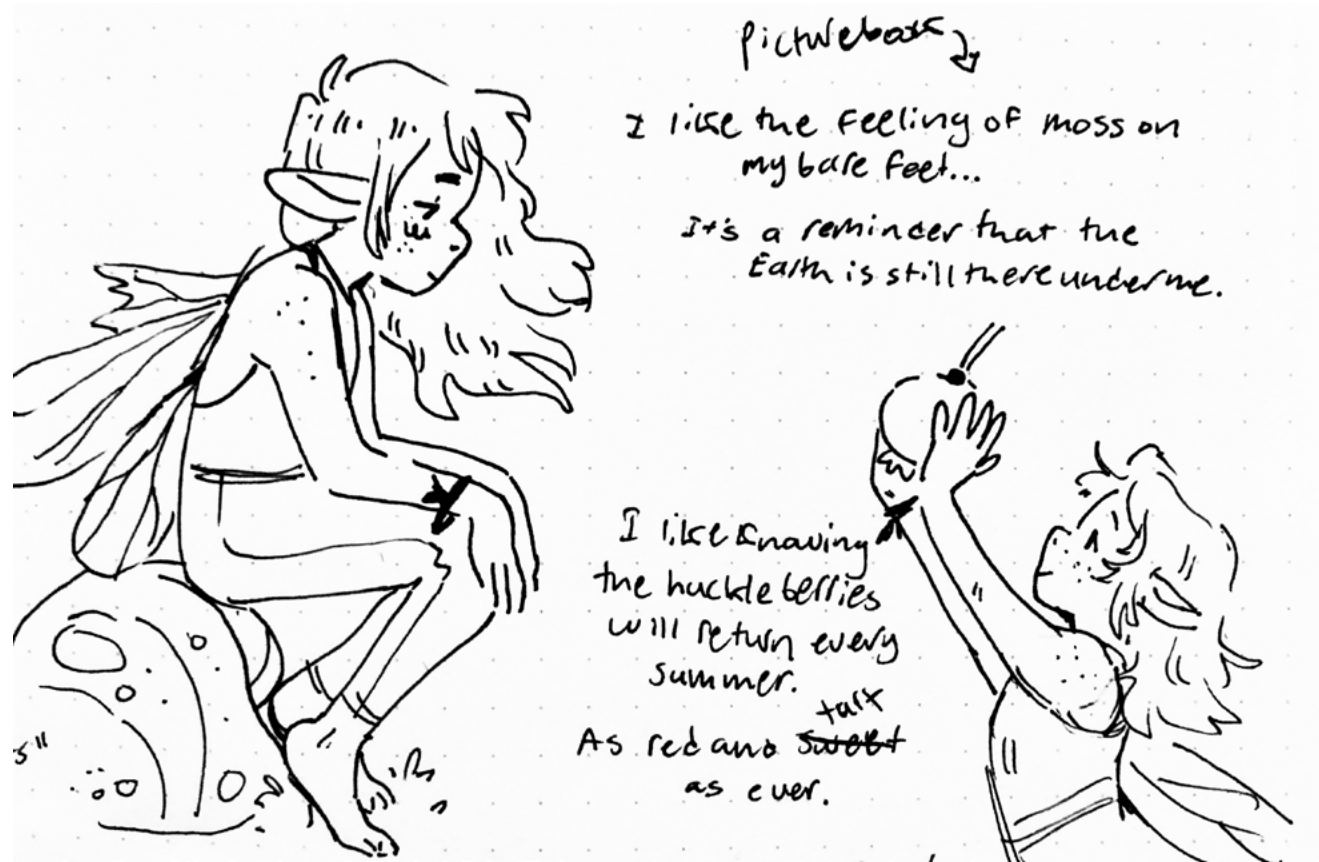
Dew Drops



wishing rocks



flown hats



Picturebook →  
 I like the feeling of moss on my bare feet...  
 It's a reminder that the Earth is still there under me.

I like knowing the huckleberries will return every summer.  
 As red and ~~soot~~ <sup>dark</sup> as ever.







FA21 | Rowan Kingsbury | Avery and the Fairy Circle | Illustration









FA21 | Rowan Kingsbury | Avery and the Fairy Circle | Illustration















First on Birch's list was licorice fern root.



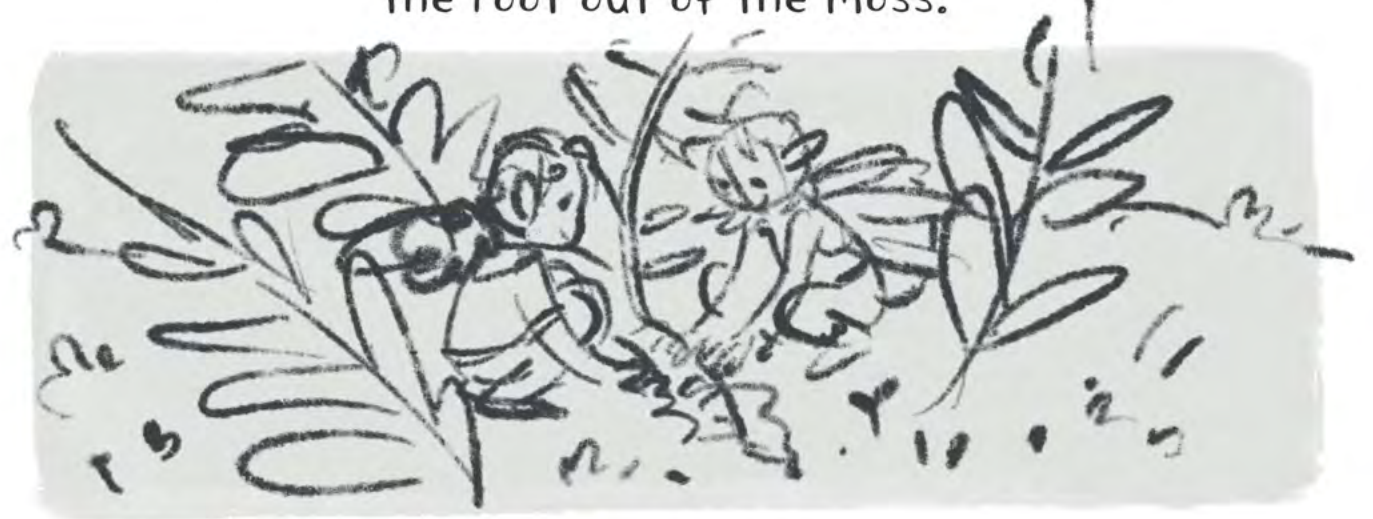
She led Avery confidently through the forest floor until they came to a big log with ferns sprouting from it.



And up they went.



At the top, they worked together to pull the root out of the moss.



Try some!



To Avery's surprise, it did taste like licorice!



**Script:**

**PAGE 1:**

Avery lived in a rolling valley surrounded by hills of evergreens.

PANEL 1: Wide shot of the valley and hills, Avery's house just barely visible in a neighborhood along the edge of the forest.

Her house was nestled on the very edge of a thick, mossy forest.

PANEL 2: A closer shot of Avery's house and the dense forest behind it. (Include some sparkles and hints at the magic hidden in the forest, not super overt.)

There weren't a lot of other kids in her neighborhood, so in the summertime she enjoyed exploring the woods alone.

PANEL 3: Avery at the back door putting on her shoes.

And today she was heading out on a quest.

PANEL 4: Avery calling out to her mom that she is heading out (to introduce dialogue early on.) Mom silhouetted in the foreground and Avery in the backdoor getting up and heading out.

Avery: "Be back soon, Mom!"

Avery's Mom: "Stay safe!"

A quest to find the first huckleberries of the season!

PANEL 5: Wide shot of Avery walking quickly and excitedly towards the forest, tying her hair up in a ponytail as she goes. Showing how impressive the forest looks.

PANEL 6: Closer shot of Avery actually stepping into the forest.

**PAGE 2:**

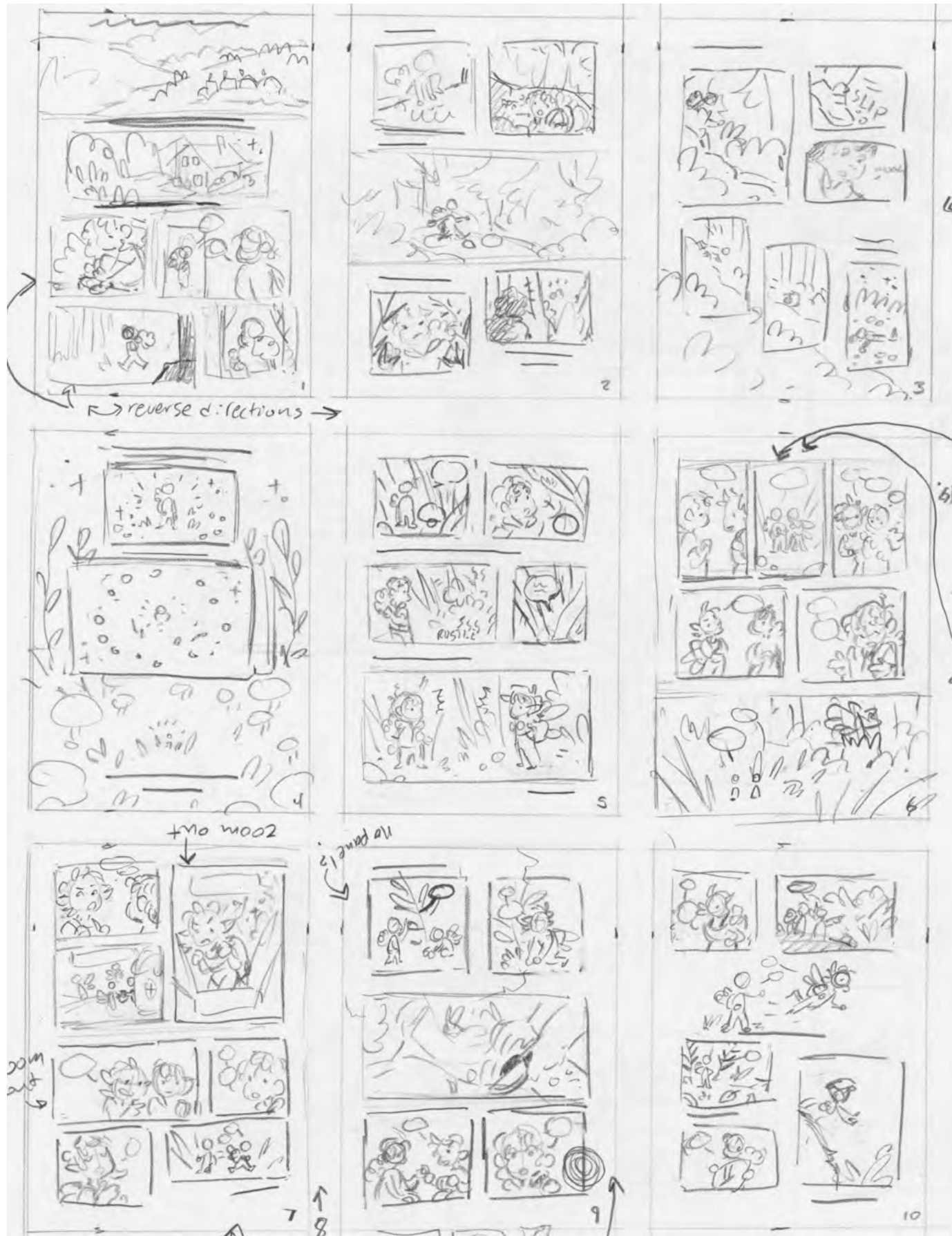
She crawled over and under logs,

PANEL 1: Avery climbing over a log near the entrance to the forest.

PANEL 2: Avery climbing under a big log, maybe getting spooked by a little bug as she goes.

Across the creek,





Set in the Pacific Northwest forest,  
a young girl named Avery stumbles into the fairy  
world while exploring one day! To get back home, she  
has to get the help of Birch, a fairy who only agrees  
if she will help her in return.

A fantastical and educational journey of friendship,  
magic, and botany follows as they traverse the now  
vast forest together.



# AVERY and the FAIRY CIRCLE



Rowan Kingsbury

Select Pages from the  
Final Book Dummy



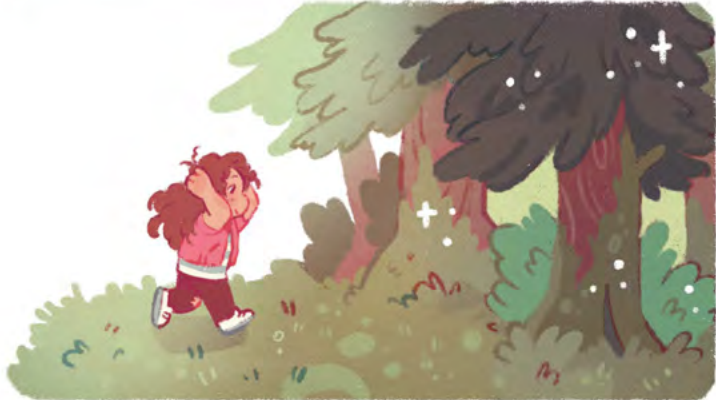
Avery lived in a rolling valley surrounded by hills of evergreens.

In the summertime she enjoyed exploring the woods,  
and today she was heading out on a quest!



I'm going  
huckleberry  
picking!

Stay safe!



Birch led Avery confidently through the forest floor.



At the top of the log, they approached the ferns.

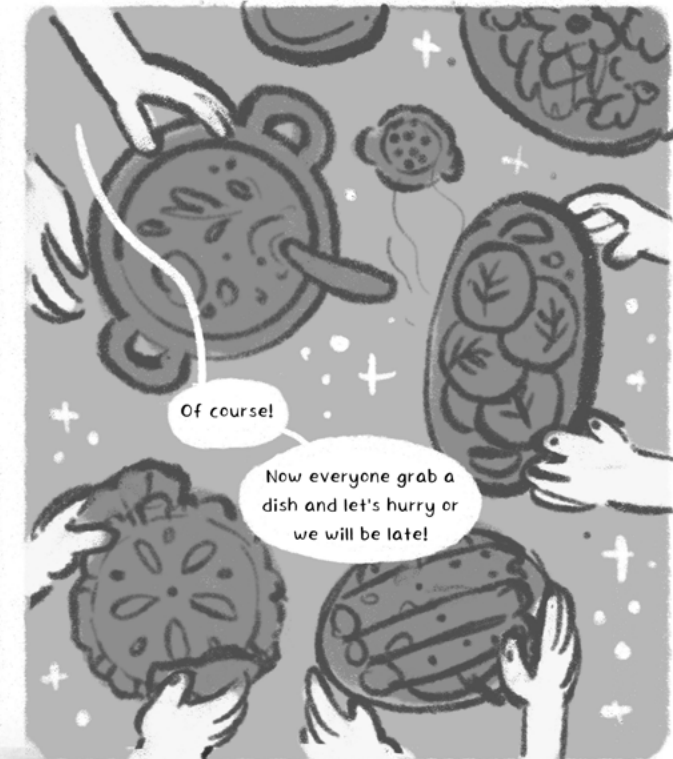




The two girls carefully retrieved the herbs from the towering shelves.



Mama added the last ingredients, some fresh water and a dash of fairy magic.



And so, their arms laden with the finished dishes, Avery and all of Birch's family headed up to the top of the stump.

Soon, they came to an opening in the undergrowth.





As the festival started there was dancing, food, and fun for all to enjoy.  
And Avery and Birch were sure to do a bit of everything.





Eventually, though, the celebration came to an end.



Avery!



I hope you enjoyed the festival, but I think it is time to get you back home.

The potion should be ready now.



Thank you!



Oh!



And here, the huckleberries you came for!



I almost forgot!

I didn't!



You have to come again for next year's festival.



She can come back.

right, mom?



Well.

Of course she can!

You know where the fairy circle is now, just return on the solstice when the magic is strong.



I would love to!

# Bibliography

Abrego, Rii, and Joe Whitt. *The Sprite and the Gardener*. Portland, OR: Oni Press, 2021.

A graphic novel about a sprite who befriends a gardener. It is large format with playful colors and served as another source of inspiration for my book's format as well as another example of media containing fairies.

Alvarez, Lorena. *Nightlights*. Nobrow, 2019.

An eerie and magical graphic novel that features inventive page layouts and bright colors. A key inspiration in my exploration of graphic novels with picture book elements.

Barker, Cicely Mary. *The Complete Book of the Flower Fairies*. London, England: Penguin Group, 2002.

This book is a very popular complete collection of plant fairy illustrations accompanied by short poems. A big inspiration for my interpretation of fairies.

Barrie, J. M., and Judith John. *Peter Pan*. London, England: Flame Tree Collectable Classics, 2021.

The classic story of Peter Pan. A source of childhood inspiration for classic narrative storytelling as well as the source of tinker bell, my first favorite fairy.

Black, Holly, and Tony DiTerlizzi. *Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You*. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

This book is an illustrated fantasy guide to mythical and fantastical creatures from the world of the spiderwick chronicles. Another influence on me when thinking about fae.

Cowley, Joy, and Christopher Denise. *The Wishing of Bidly Malone*. New York, NY: Puffin Books, 2006.

A picture book about a girl who meets a fairy prince and makes a wish. Another childhood favorite of mine that laid the groundwork for the narrative of Avery and the Fairy Circle.

De Lint, Charles, and Charles Vess. *A Circle of Cats*. New York, New York: Viking, 2003.

An illustrated storybook about a free-spirited girl, cats, old magic, and kindness. A folktale like story that is gently magical and foundational to my interest in storytelling. My favorite story book as a kid that sets the tone for this project.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Tantor Media, Inc., 2016.

A nonfiction book about blending the lenses of indigenous and scientific knowledge of plants and animals. It was informative and encouraged me to reflect on what knowledge I was including and what lessons I wanted to pass down through my own story.

O'Neill, Katie. *The Tea Dragon Society*. Portland, Oregon: Oni Press, 2017.

A middle grade graphic novel about a fantasy world where little dragons grow tea on their horns and are kept as pets. Shows the potential for shorter length, large format, and picture book adjacent graphic novels for young audiences. An inspiration for how I could stylize my work as well to maintain a lush and colorful look in the fast paced work of comics.

Pojar, Jim, and Andrew MacKinnon. *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast: Washington, Oregon, British Columbia & Alaska*. Auburn, WA: Lone Pine, 2016.

A guide to native plants of the Pacific Northwest and their uses. Useful in deciding which plants to include in my narrative and making sure my information was accurate.

Shulevitz, Uri. *Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books*. New York:

Watson-Guptill Publications, 1985.

A great walkthrough of the picture book process from conception to execution. Explains story creation and book dummies.

Thumbelina. United States: Warner Bros., 1994.

The movie adapted from Hans Christian Anderson's story. Served as inspiration for the setting as seen from a person only a few inches tall.

Todd-Stanton, Joe. *Brownstone's Mythical Collection: Mary and the Riddle of the Sphinx*. London, England: Flying Eye Books, 2017.

A picture book about a little girl's mythological adventure that utilizes some comic aspects, another example of the format I'm exploring but one that leans a bit more towards picture books than graphic novels.