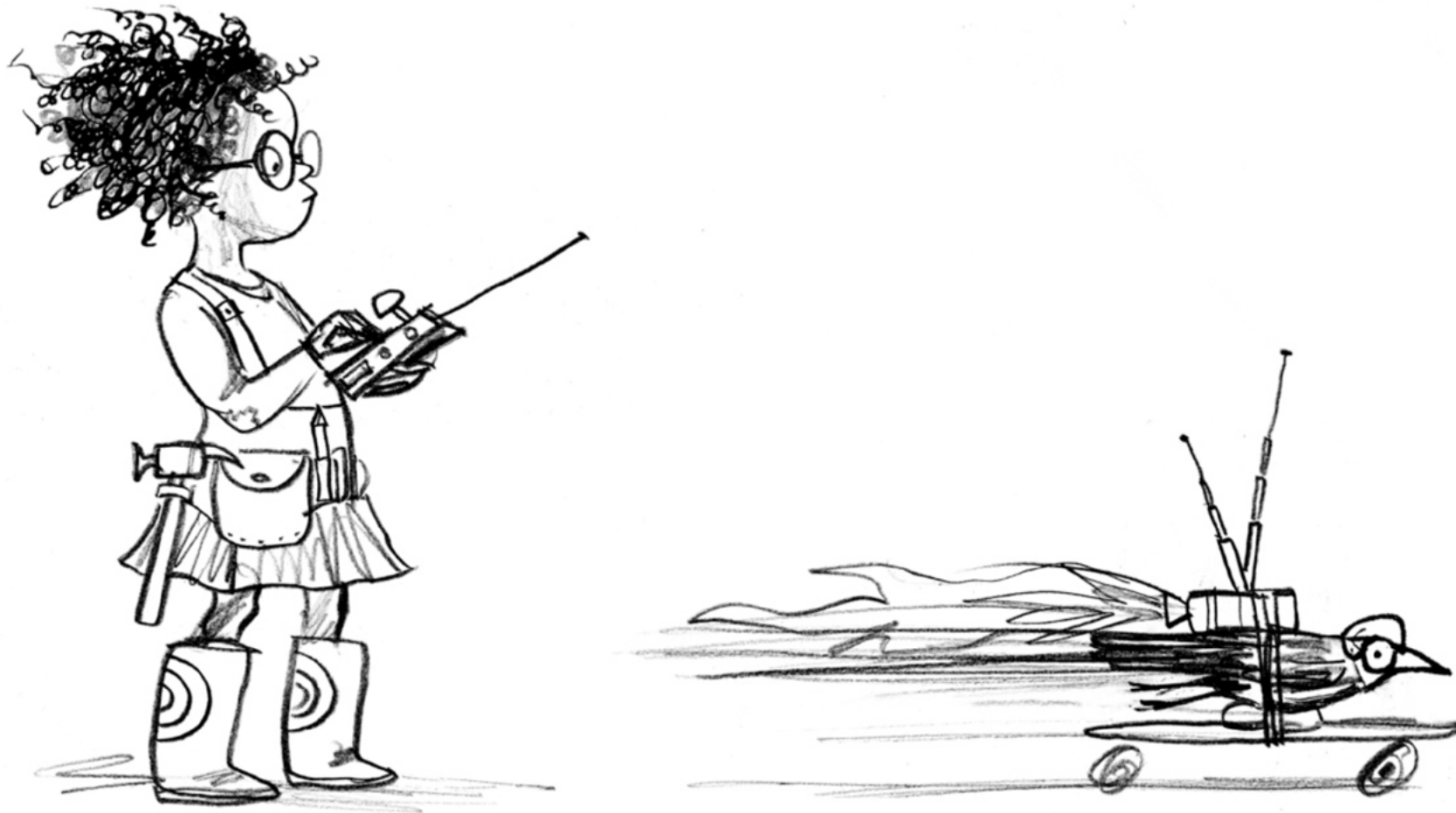




IZZY GIZMO



Type of output:
Artefact

by
Sara Ogilvie

Pushing for positive
role models in picture
books - an illustrator's
perspective.

Front cover:
Izzy Gizmo Illustration.
Credit: Sara Ogilvie.

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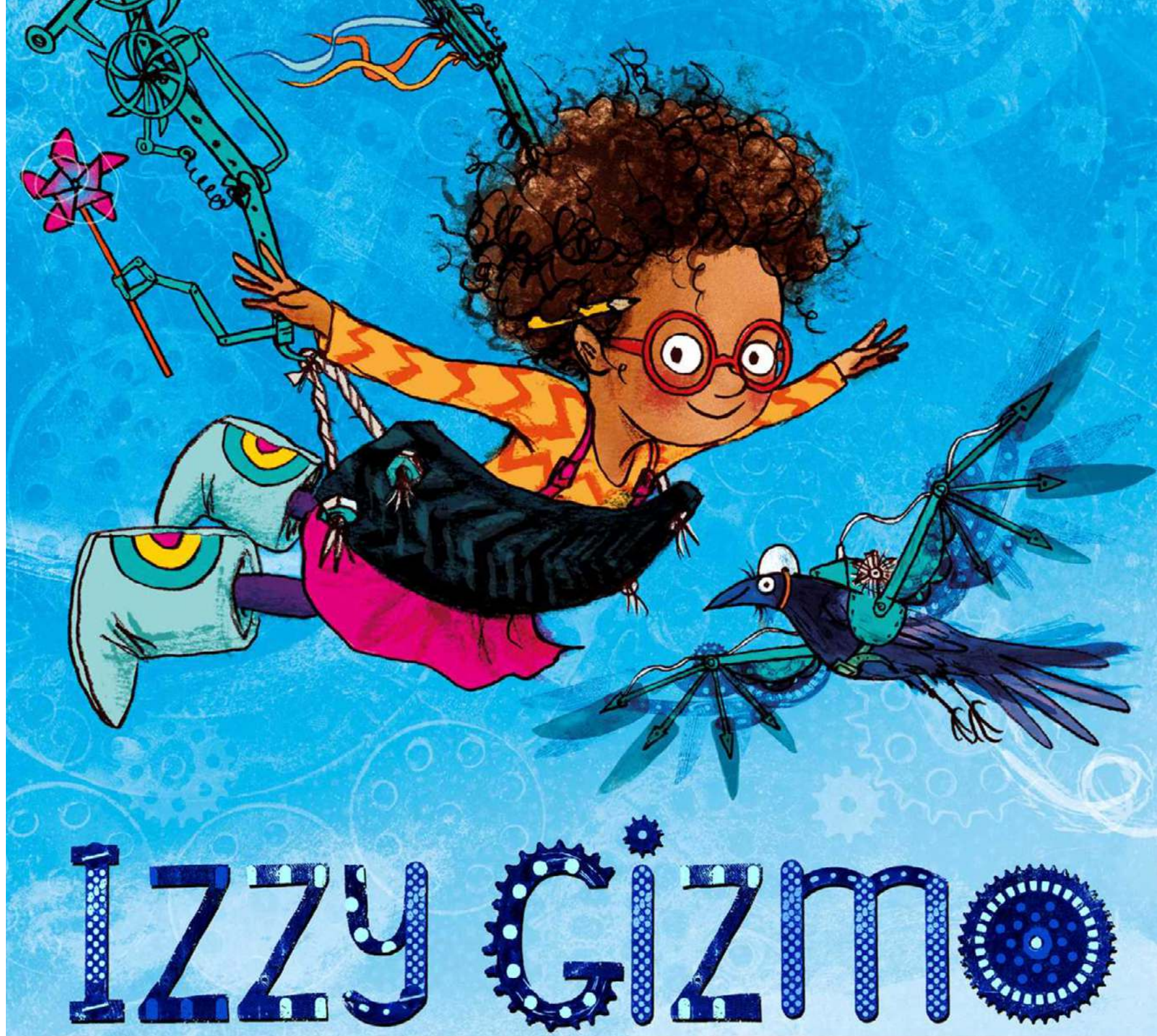
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SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

Izzy Gizmo is a critically recognised picture book collaboration with the writer Pip Jones published by Simon and Schuster (UK) in 2017. This work was developed in the context of increasing concern around the lack of diversity within fictional lead characters in picture book industry. Research undertaken by The Centre for Literacy and Primary Education/ Arts Council England confirmed that during 2017 of 9,115 titles published in the UK's children's book sector only 4% featured BAME characters. This compares to the 32.1% of schoolchildren of minority ethnic origins in England identified by the Department of Education.

Ogilvie chose to address these shortcomings by researching and developing a unique black female character, so promoting a 'growth mindset' (Dweck 2006). The development of her character and her visual world was rooted in a practice-led methodology that utilised primary archive work conducted at the Seven Stories (Newcastle, National Centre for Children's books, UK) and Ogilvie's on-going use of non-verbal language to strengthen and support the book's central themes. The outcome is a picture book that positively contributes on many levels – *Izzy Gizmo* as a female identity functions a role model who is not only black but also an engineer learning to develop her own design process, confidence and self-sufficiency. As a piece of learning based literature, this picture book creates a framework for all children, but importantly better enables children from ethnic minorities to begin to make sense of their world and their potential place within it. Furthermore the book was released by Simon and Schuster (UK), a leading British publisher known for their roster of commercially successful and award-winning books. Positioning *Izzy Gizmo* within the contemporary book market maximizes the reach of this work and provides important broad societal

impact. The title has been shortlisted for the Sainsbury's Children's Book Prize 2017, Hearst/WH Smith Big Book award 2018, and longlisted for the North Somerset Teachers' Book Award in 2018. It has also entered teaching curriculums at pre and primary school levels in the UK, USA and Canada and has been adapted as a participatory reading/musical performance for Durham Book Festival (2018). To date the book has been co-published internationally in 8 countries outside the UK. Following this success, a second title *Izzy Gizmo and the Invention Convention* (by Ogilvie and Jones) was released in 2019 and was awarded the WH Smith Book of the year.



Right: *Izzy Gizmo*
Book Front Cover.
Credit: Sara Ogilvie.

“Sara Ogilvie’s depiction of Izzy’s frustrated expressions are absolutely wonderful, and it’s great to see a picture book represent a black girl so delightfully enmeshed in her technological inventions.”

(Book Trust, 2017)

Right: *Izzy Gizmo*
Character development.
Credit: Sara Ogilvie.



‘This story of a girl engineer is sorely needed and has potential to develop and nourish readers’ interest in STEM subjects. Additionally, themes of creativity and tenacity, together with the portrayal of a girl who’s allowed to show anger and frustration, make this a worthwhile read. Fun, with depth.’

Kirkus reviews for Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, co edition 2018.



Right: Izzy Gizmo Illustration.
Credit: Sara Ogilvie.

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

It is acknowledged both pedagogically and commercially that the success of a picture book narrative hinges on the characters taking the reader on their journey from start to finish. This enables learning and literacy development. Published material for a preschool and the early years age group should present a range of characters and role models that reflect their lives and the hurdles that can challenge them, however representation in picture books still fails to reflect society - notably in terms of ethnic diversity, class and gender. The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) report showed that only 4% of releases in the UK featured BAME characters, furthermore only 1% had a BAME main character. Farrah Serroukh director of the 2018 study also flagged that those books that did feature BAME characters as leads or as supporting characters also predominately focused on struggle-based narratives exploring immigration, war and or conflict thematic. Serroukh argues that alongside better representation there is also the need to engage with more balanced and positive social realities featuring BAME groups. The lack of this balance results in continued marginalisation.

Whilst still offering a competitively mainstream product for the publisher Simon and Schuster (UK) as a way to foster broad change / social value, this research project seeks to redress this imbalance by:

Creating a positive role model whom BAME children can identify with and can encourage the beginning of positive relationship with early stage literacy skills. A secondary benefit is to also ensure the narrative is engaging for a broad range of child readers (non BAME and BAME alike), parents, teachers and librarians.

Aim 1: Address the lack of BAME representation in picture book publishing

Also of interest to Ogilvie was the CLPE report's finding that the majority of human picture book characters leads are still white boys. For Ogilvie, readdressing this was also an opportunity to also respond to broader concern around the shortage of girls going into engineering and scientific STEM professions. This challenge became an opportunity to further develop the traits and skills/mind set around the character design and the narrative world.

The visual normative social tropes of femininity often focus on princess aesthetic, in terms of behaviours girls are often positioned as kind, nurturing and passive (Swanson 2016), and rarely portrayed having emotions such as anger or frustration. Traits such as energetic, mischievous or fun are more commonly located in representations of young boys (who to date dominate gender in picture books human protagonists). Ogilvie counters these on-going social stereotypes projected onto young girls within children's picture books.

Below: Twitter screen grab. Credit: B. K., (2018) Victoria Park Academy, Smethwick, West Midlands, UK. <https://twitter.com/MissKJLB/status/952963544013770753>

Aim 2: Problematising gender stereotypes in lead character portrayals - advocate that girls can be good 'at' technology.

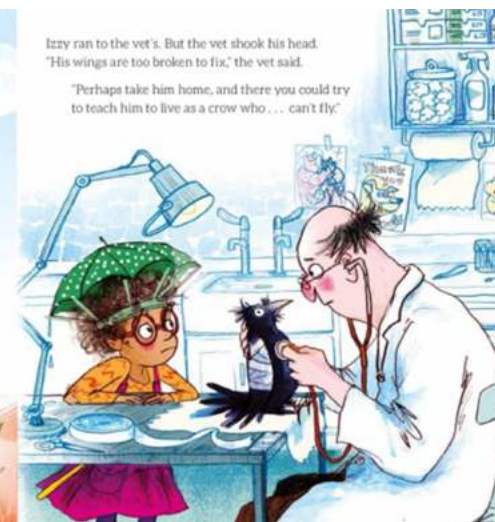
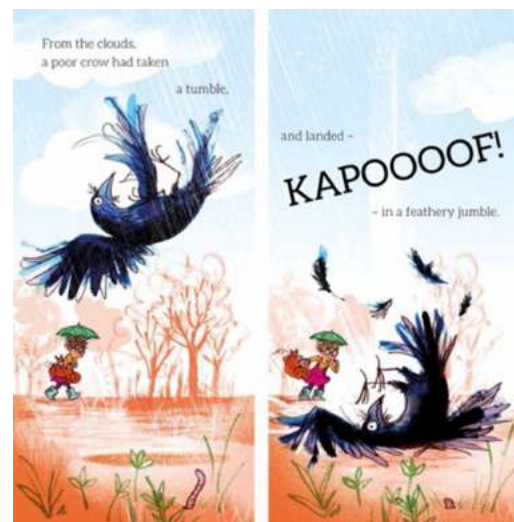
'Growth Mindset' is defined by Carol Dweck (2016) as a belief that "people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point." An aim for this project was to create a book where, through their reading experience, children (esp. BAME girls) can learn to question, cope and overcome challenges through observing a lead female black character struggling to problem solve and learning that success comes with perseverance.

Aim 3: Demonstrate a 'Growth Mindset' by showing that girls can have challenging emotions; can be resourceful and develop strategies for their own problem solving.



'We read to know we are not alone'

C.S. Lewis in William Nicholson's play
Shadowlands (1989).



Above: Izzy Gizmo Final spreads.

Credit: Sara Ogilvie.

CONTEXT

Ogilvie is an award winning Printmaker and Illustrator and regarded as an expert practitioner in children's literature with 29 years of experience in the field. She is frequently invited to speak at book festivals such as the Edinburgh International Book Festival, The Book Trust, The Folio Society and Picture Books (V&A Dundee). *Izzy Gizmo* builds on Ogilvie's previous research which explores successful text and image relationships through storytelling and practical methodologies for developing cognitively engaging characters that young readers can identify with and care for. Ogilvie's proposition is that our first learning encounter whilst developing literacy with reading is from listening and 'reading' through observing the pictures on pages being narrated. As a genre this ethical responsibility of what is told, observed and understood (in dialogue with the adult reader) is critical. Picture books audiences are typically aged between 4 and 8, and as such are developmentally on a journey not only to attain literacy, but also by inference make sense of their world and their place within it. This means that young readers (and their adults) are vulnerable to any unconscious, unhelpful and potentially harmful normative portrayals of society. The CLPE 2018 report also flagged that within the 391 BAME children's books released that year over 50% were classed as contemporary realism and 10% contained social justice issues, such as immigration, war and conflict. Only one children's book submission featuring a BAME character, and one defined as comedic. The director of the report Farrah Serroukh starkly warns "that if children do not see their realities reflected in the world around them or only see problematic representations mirrored back at them, the impact can be tremendously damaging."

Both UCAS and HESA data sets over multiple years have shown that women have been underrepresented in STEM university courses and occupations (Stem Women, 2021). Initiatives such as [#STEMsational](#) and Stem.org are trying to counter this by positive messaging in primary school, where girls are actively encouraged to discover new knowledge through reading about science and engineering. This is traditionally done through engagement with non-fiction books (see Reading Rocks), however for many young children struggling with literacy, building an appetite for learning non-fiction is a further challenge (Lemov, Driggs, Woolway 2016). Fiction picture books can provide escapism and fantasy or offer 'historical fiction'. *Izzy Gizmo* is set in a third space - an imaginative world anchored in plausible real-life contexts and relationships.

<https://www.stemwomen.co.uk/blog/2021/01/women-in-stem-percent-ages-of-women-in-stem-statistics>

METHODS AND PROCESSES

Ogilvie's research was driven by a practice-led methodology. The interrelationship between text and image is vital, both mechanisms need to work together to support the reader, the text can drive the pacing of the vocabulary and describe elements of character whereas the visuals will complete and enhance this characterisation whilst also determining the visual world of the story.

For the majority of this project Ogilvie and Pip worked separately (Books For Keeps), as standard in picture book publishing.

Stage 1 Research

Publisher shares the draft text, Ogilvie starts the ideation phase. a process that is built around the practice of collecting of visual ephemera and then 'playing' (Nelson 2004) with seemingly random elements, exploring the potential meaning that comes from serendipitous combinations and then applying them to particular themes of the draft text.

Izzy Gizmo also required specific investigation into the visual language of engineering to inform the appearance of the 'gizmo's and the physicality of invention. Ogilvie used her drawing practice to develop the preliminary character and story visuals this was supported by primary archive work at the Seven Stories (Newcastle, UK).

Stage 2 Narrative Development / Rough Sequence

Right: Investigation of the visual language of engineering with character.

Credit: Sara Ogilvie.



Initial designs are laid out in sequence to check the visual pacing against the text. During this phase (with the research challenge and aims in mind) Ogilvie established the following design framework for Izzy's character:

- **She should not be a 'princess-y girl'**

The children's market across book and games often makes a strong separation of what is considered for boy and for girls. Marketing defaults to the pink princess approach (Haines, 2014). Ogilvie takes ethical responsibility in the characters she produces, and Izzy does not conform to either a princess or a tomboy. She has own individual look and is a pro-active 'can do' character.

- **She needs to openly express frustration but determination.**

Not often seen with female characters. The narrative world needs to visualise Izzy correctly. Creating emotion and exploring her creative problem solving will make her both vulnerable and relatable to the reader. Emotional literacy alongside verbal and visual literacy is an increasingly important element of picture books (Nikolajeva, 2013).

- **Inclusivity and Diversity**

Izzy will be identifiable as a little black girl, as established as a core research problem, diverse characters are sorely underrepresented in children's literature. Historically human lead characters in picture books tend to be white boys.

Story Synopsis Confirmed by Jones and Ogilvie:

"Izzy is an inventor whose machines often fail. One day when a crow falls from the sky and breaks its wings Izzy takes on the challenge of trying to help him to fly again. Izzy displays a range of natural frustrations when things don't work out, however with the calm encouragement of her Grandpa she manages to succeed while also leaving a bit of chaos in her wake as she 'borrows' the parts she needs to make mechanical wings."

Stage 3 Publisher Approval

After final book layouts are produced, Ogilvie's visuals are discussed with the writer Jones, Simon and Schuster's Art Director and Editor then final decisions are made about the narrative arc and final print layout decisions.

DISSEMINATION

Public launch (hardback, paperback and Ebook) was achieved in 10.8.2017. See official page:

<https://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/books/Izzy-Gizmo/Pip-Jones/9780857075123>

Since release in 2017 the publication has been adopted into the classroom both nationally and in the USA (see references section) and is currently being co-published in 8 countries outside the UK: USA (Peachtree), Holland (Lemniscaat), Turkey (Pearson), Sweden (Goboken), Catalan (Blume), Spain (Blume) Japan (BL 2018), French Canadian (Scholastic Canada 2018).



Above: Twitter screen grab. Credit: Tudhoe Colliery Primary School.

Evidence of Impact

Danielle Sam-York a schoolteacher at Jubilee Primary School, South London told ITV News that the initiative is exactly what her children need:

"I think this is brilliant, especially working in an inner city London school, it is what they need, it's the books that I didn't have when I was growing up and it's the books that they can relate to – especially a school in the middle of Tulse Hill estate and it's just something that 'oh actually that's me in the book, or that's mum in the book and that's what I do normally so I think it's really important for the children and important for them to see themselves in literature."

(6th March 2019, ITV News)

As intended, *Izzy Gizmo* has been added into multiple resources to promote better diversity:

Chicago Public Library, (2019). *We Need Diverse Books! Multicultural Storytime for Babies, Toddlers, and Children*.
<https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/list/share/152933812/1215948487>

Guillain, A., (2018). *Children's Books Need More Diverse Characters*
<https://www.teachwire.net/news/childrens-books-need-more-diverse-characters>

Macfarlane, T., (2017). *Why I'm taking inclusive book fairs into schools*.
<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2017/september/why-im-taking-inclusive-book-fairs-into-schools/>

Pollard, L., (2019). *Little Box of Books initiative diversity showcase for World Book Day*.

ITV News.
<https://www.itv.com/news/2019-03-06/world-book-day-2019-children-books-bame-diversity-representation>

<https://littleboxofbooks.co.uk/2019/03/06/world-book-day/>

Williams, I., J. (2017). *Children's books roundup: the best new picture books and novels* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/26/childrens-books-roundup>

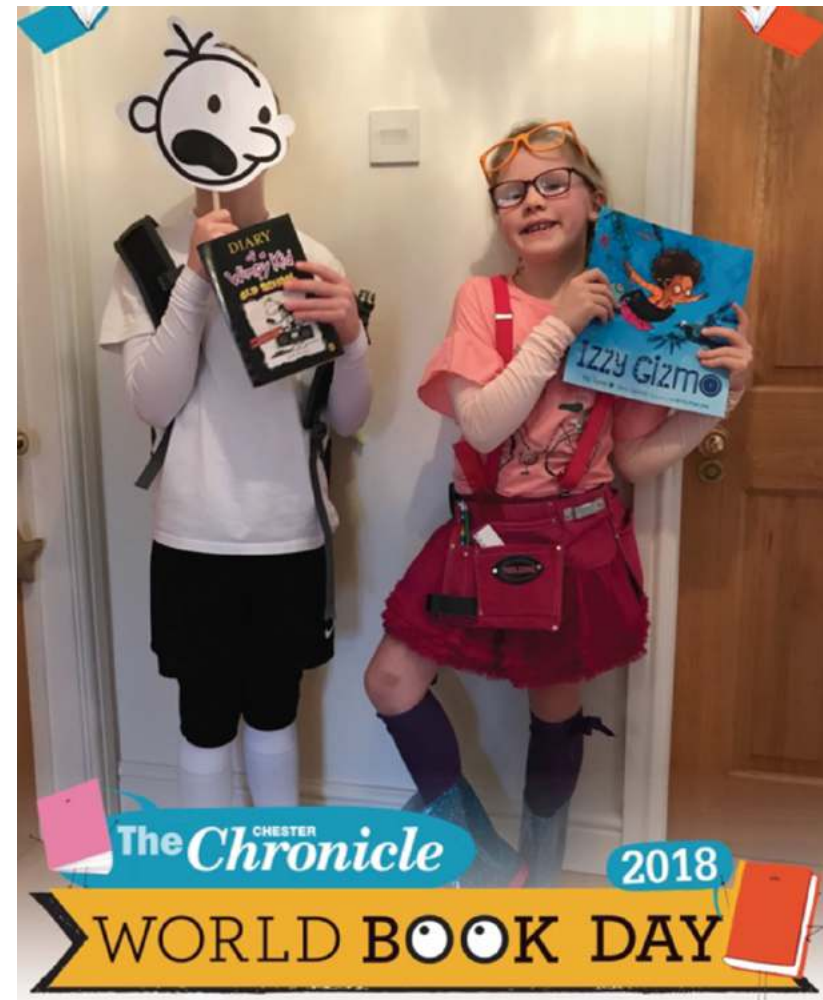
Mumblog.co.uk (2017). *Seven children's picture books with inspirational female characters* <https://www.mumblog.co.uk/seven-childrens-picture-books-with-inspirational-female-characters/>

Foyles, (2017). #FoylesFive: *Black History Month*
<https://www.foyles.co.uk/blog-foylesfive-bhm-picturebooks>



Above: ITV news screen grab.

Social media platforms such as Twitter have shown that *Izzy Gizmo* has also featured as a character in World Book day, an opportunity for children to choose a character that resonates with them via dress up for school.



Left: World Book Day as *Izzy Gizmo*.

Image credit: Lansdell, K., (2018).

<https://twitter.com/KatieLansdell/status/969540582015201280>

In 2018 *Izzy Gizmo*, was featured in a Seven Stories (UK) collaboration with Dr Richardson (Newcastle University) for his “Geographies of Gender and Generation” BA (Hons) Geography module that allowed students to “*explore intergenerational practice as an intervention method for the promotion of gender equality.*”

Furthermore, *Izzy Gizmo* has also been adapted for the 2018 Durham Book Festival’s inaugural Little Read, which resulted in a distribution of the book throughout the county and a production of an innovative ‘story-gig’. As part of this project Durham Gala theatre’s director Ruth Mary Johnson and musical director Jeremy Bradfield visited five community centres in the former mining villages of County Durham to read the story of *Izzy Gizmo* to groups of children and their families. Each group was then invited to create a song that illustrated a part of the *Izzy Gizmo* story, this culminated in the ‘story-gig’ performance to 400 under 8s and their families on 13th October 2018 in the Gala theatre.



Above: Video stills of the adaptation songs from Blackhall / Tow Law / Greenhills / Horden / Pelton Community centres.
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL386YDHfVGtwujwql1gfm-9kV4ROe2uV7>

Left: <https://durhambookfestival.com/read/blog-izzy-gizmo-a-story-gig/>

In terms of commercial recognition and esteem, the work has been shortlisted for the Sainsbury's Children's Book Prize 2017, Hearst/WH Smith Big Book award 2018, Longlisted for the North Somerset Teachers' Book Award 2018. In addition to directly contributing a vehicle that demonstrates better diversity Ogilvie and Jones have also delivered this successfully through a commercial relationship with Simon and Schuster (UK), this is also significant – symbolising to the sector that leading publishers can make positive steps towards diversifying the themes and characterisations in the picture book sector whilst also winning industry awards. In 2019, a second book, also published by Simon and Schuster (UK), entitled *Izzy Gizmo and the Invention Convention* was released and was awarded the WH Smith Book of the year. In 2019, Izzy Gizmo was featured by Purdue University's INSPIRE Research Institute for pre-college engineering applicants and in 2020 was cited as an exemplar for *Pathways into Children's Publishing*, a pioneering programme for aspiring children's illustrators from diverse backgrounds .

Further Evidence of School Curriculum / Civic Library Citations

Anon (2017). Seven Stories Reader in Residence Programme:
<https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/learning/reader-in-residence/reader-in-residence-digital/years-5-and-6/izzy-gizmo>

Anon. (2019) Molesey Library Surrey, UK.
https://twitter.com/search?q=izzygizmo&src=typed_query

Anon. (2019) Fareham Library, Hampshire, UK.

Anon. (2019) Tang Hall, York, UK.
<https://twitter.com/TangHallExplore/status/1199305147303780353>

Anon. (2020) *Pathways into Children's Publishing*
<https://twitter.com/PathwaysINTO/status/1232265247483973633>

Anon. (2019) Peel District School Board's Interval and Intensive Support Programs, Ontario, Canada. <https://twitter.com/IntervalPeel/status/1099858571511152640>

Barlestone, Leicester Academies Trust Primary School, UK
<https://twitter.com/BarlestonePS1/status/1045242017121529856/photo/1>

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<https://twitter.com/pleasantstreads/status/974740393383391239/photo/1>

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https://twitter.com/MrsT_thatsme/status/1310773515688304640/photo/1

Wake, A., (2018) Meadowview Elementary School Illinois USA.
<https://twitter.com/MrsWakeReads/status/981539349895446528>

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Anon. (2017). *The Book Trust Review* <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/book/i/izzy-gizmo/>

Anon. (2018). *Toppsta Reviews* <https://toppsta.com/books/details/436300/izzy-gizmo>

Anon.(2020). *The Book Shacks Women in Engineering Day*
https://twitter.com/the_bookshack/status/1275353413295931393

“I doubt many will fail to fall for Izzy and her mechanical mind. Pip Jones’ rhyming narrative is a cracker to read aloud and Sara Ogilvie’s imagination must be almost as fertile as young Izzy’s... A real riot.”
Bennet, J.,(2017) <https://redreadinghub.blog/tag/izzy-gizmo/>

Clarke, J. (2017) <https://bookloverjo.wordpress.com/2017/09/11/izzy-gizmo-pip-jones-sara-ogilvie/>

Carmicheal, L., (2018). *LibrarySpark Diversity list*.
<https://twitter.com/libraryspark/status/1015633937509437440>

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2018. <https://vanmeterlibraryvoice.blogspot.com/2018/07/izzy-gizmoan-inspiring-determined-fun.html>

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<https://theaoi.com/2018/01/08/izzy-gizmo-book-review/>

“If you’re looking for a new book with a determined, strong female role model then this is for you”
Being a Mummy blog.

‘This was such a fun book. We need more books with girl inventors!’
Twirling Book Princess blog.

‘This exuberantly riotous story... blends the fun of rhyme with the touching friendship between a charismatic crow and a never-say-die young inventor’
Lancashire Evening Post.

‘A lovely story of ingenuity and determination’
Parents in Touch, Cited in Stiles, N., ReadingZone Online.
<https://readingzone.com/index.php?zone=sz&page=book&isbn=9780857075130>

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Stem Woman (2021) *Women in STEM | Percentages of Women in STEM Statistics*. <https://www.stemwomen.co.uk/blog/2021/01/women-in-stem-percentages-of-women-in-stem-statistics>

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Wright, H., (2019), *Reading Rocks STEMsational Books for British Science Week*.

