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Cleo's Crown: An Original Illustrated Children's Book

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Mion, Rachael, "Cleo's Crown: An Original Illustrated Children's Book" (2021). *Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects*. 1341.

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Cleo's Crown: An Original Illustrated Children's Book

Rachael Mion

Williams Honors College Research Project

April 8, 2020

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Rachael Mion

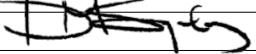
Department of Graphic Design

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

*The Williams Honors College
The University of Akron*

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 Date: 4.17/21

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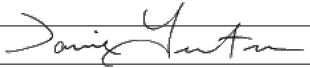
Reader (printed)

Accepted:

 Date: 04/28/2021

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 Date: 4-28-2021

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Artist Statement

As children, our imagination is extremely vast and unpredictable, and the books we read influence how we view the world. As we grow, many people slowly lose the ability to get lost in their imagination. With Cleo's Crown, I wanted to bring back some of the magic that inspired me as a child, and the art is heavily influenced by physical representations of magic and creativity. This project was created to spark others imagination and remind them of their childhood. Even after the book and my exhibition is completed, I am determined to share and hopefully publish Cleo's Crown. I am hoping that one day the bright colors and characters of Cleo's Crown inspires children, and they fall in love with the book just as I have.

Roald Dahl once said, “Those who don’t believe in magic will never find it.”¹ As people grow up, they tend to lose the magic in their lives; people become more focused on school, work, and other activities. Eventually the common phrase, “I miss being a kid!” comes out of everyone’s mouths. People miss the carefree attitude when they were a kid. Children are constantly using their imagination to create amazing scenarios and worlds in their head, and adults miss that feeling. They miss the ability to look at the world for all its potential; they miss the freedom it gave them. When does this magic disappear, and how can someone reignite it?

These are the questions that were tackled with this research project. Similar to Dahl’s idea of believing in magic, it is difficult to enchant people who bury themselves under the stress of their life. When starting this project, the ideal target audience needed to be determined, but when audience is children, it is assumed that the children will not buy a children’s book off the shelf. They will definitely bring books to their parent or guardian to buy, but ultimately, it is the parent or guardian’s choice whether or not the book is going into the cart.

Another aspect that was taken into consideration was bedtime stories; often times, a child could possibly pick the same exact book every night and ask it to be read over and over again. Knowing this and experiencing this personally, the concept and research for the children’s book focused heavily on unique art styles and word

¹ Dahl, Roald, and Patrick Benson. *Story*. In *The Minpins*. London: Puffin, 2016.

play that would hopefully spare parents and/or guardians some pain when it came to bedtime stories.

With some sparse previous knowledge on children's books and children themselves, it was time to delve deeper into just how children and parents and/or guardians viewed children's books. In 2016, Old Mate Media, a children's book publisher, conducted a survey to explore the habits of parents when it came to buying and reading books to their children. It was found that about 70% of parents and/or guardians think that it is extremely important to read to their child one or more times

a day.² One survey participant even went on to say, "Reading has been the biggest gift given between my daughter and myself. We share stories, experiences and fun when reading and I would love for my daughter to be able to learn, educate herself, escape and have the wildest of dreams. I know that reading can give all of that to her and more!"³

Another study in 2011 was done by Bowker, a company that is known for its "bibliographic information and management solutions designed to help publishers, authors, and booksellers better serve their customers."⁴ They found that around 40% of purchases for children from the ages 0–7 are often bought on impulse, and another

² Old Mate Media "Picture Book Survey Report: Buying and Reading Habits of Parents," published October 17, 2016, <https://oldmatemedia.com/picture-book-survey-report/>.

³ Old Mate Media, "Picture Book"

⁴ Bowker, "About Bowker," <http://www.bowker.com>

40% of people intended to buy a book without a specific one in mind.⁵ In total, 80% of books bought are not planned out ahead of time.

Gathering this information and then applying it to creating *Cleo's Crown* was essential. The book needed to stand out from other children's books, but it also needed to belong on the bookshelf next to them. Keeping this in mind, the next step of the process was to look at existing children's books, especially successful, popular ones. Several authors such as Dr. Suess, Roald Dahl, and Maurice Sendak were used as inspiration. Not only was the art inspected, but the actual story was looked at. To have a successful children's book that grabbed the attention of both parent and child, there needed to be a marriage between the illustrations and the written story.

Although the book's primary audience is children with its secondary audience being parents and/or guardians, the development for children is vastly different. For example, children around two years old wouldn't be able to read a chapter book that a seven-year-old could. According to an accomplished editor, John Matthew Fox, children from the ages 7–12 gravitate towards chapter books. Fox also mentions that most picture books are aimed at children from the ages of 3–7 with around 750

⁵ Publisher Weekly, "What Do Children's Book Consumers Want?" January 31, 2011, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/45943-what-do-children-s-book-consumers-want.html>

words. He also stressed the importance of keeping a children's book under 1000 words.⁶

After researching the basics of children's books, the actual concept for the entire book was needed. When the final idea for the book was decided, there were many ideas floating around. The brainstorming started with general messages that the book would be based on, such as "be yourself" or "treat others the way you would like to be treated." The messages then turned into possible themes the book could revolve around. Overall, the book went through four different possibilities for themes, including the four seasons, fairies, dark versus light, and mermaids. The final two themes that were developed further were the children of the four seasons and the mermaid princess. In the end, *Cleo's Crown*, takes place in a fantasy world in the ocean and follows a small princess by the name of Cleo.

In the beginning of the story development, Cleo did not have a name yet; she was dubbed "the princess" until her character was developed further. Referencing back to John Matthew Fox, main characters need to be unique and memorable. The child and parent reading a children's book need to believe that this character is real. They need to have quirks, habits, and faults. What are their secrets; what do they desire?⁷ Although a children's book might not answer these questions directly in the

⁶ John Matthew Fox, "How to Write a Children's Book in 12 Steps (From an Editor)", <https://thejohnfox.com/2019/02/how-to-write-a-childrens-book/>

⁷ John Matthew Fox, "Children's Book"

children's book, it helps the writer and illustrator develop a close connection to this character to help them become the main character.

All the characters of *Cleo's Crown* are based on different animals found within the ocean. For example, Cleo and the queen are both Lion's Mane Jellyfish which is one of the largest jellyfish in the world with the record being about seven feet in diameter and 120 feet in length. The Lion's Mane Jellyfish was chosen for Cleo and the queen because it is the largest in the world; it was fitting that the largest jellyfish species would "rule" over the rest of the ocean. The side characters in *Cleo's Crown* are based off of a humpback whale, hermit crab, and goblin shark. Each side character presented a problem to Cleo which she helped them fix.

Eventually it came down to writing out Cleo's quirks, habits, faults, etc... Cleo is a princess who is an introvert and is often shy but will emerge from her shell if there is something she truly desires. She is clumsy and her hair is unruly and hardly ever perfect. These were just some of the original ideas of Cleo that brought her to life. Writing about Cleo was a tremendous help in developing her personality, but there was still the discussion of look and style.

Overall, the style exploration ended up filling about twenty pages with a total of 160 pieces of artwork that helped fuel the project further. Different styles of art including oil, acrylic, watercolor, and digital painting were studied, which filled another couple of pages with countless revisions to perfect the ideal style for *Cleo's*

Crown. One artist really stuck out above others: Helen Wells.⁸ When her art was discovered, it advanced the project's illustration style in the perfect direction. While the final work of *Cleo's Crown* is vastly different from Helen Wells' art, the overall feeling and movement of her work inspired the final style.

For the next phase, the actual story needed to be outlined. The only points of interest laid out were the setting and characters. The story was given a general summary with main plot guidelines. Cleo is a princess who is struggling to find or make a gift for her mother's, the queen's, birthday. When she learns that the queen's crown is missing, she ventures outside the castle to search for materials to make the perfect crown for her mother. While on her journey, she meets several different mermaids who are in need of help. These include a humpback whale mermaid couple who need help finding the stage for the birthday celebration, a hermit crab mermaid who needs a bigger shell for her family, and a goblin shark mermaid who needs help with his confidence. After helping fix all three problems, Cleo was given the perfect materials for the crown from her new friends and builds the crown. As she is racing through the castle to find her mother, Cleo trips and is accidentally hurled into a wall, crushing the new crown. Devastated, Cleo hides in her room when the birthday party begins which is where the queen finds her. After consoling her daughter, the queen helps Cleo realize that she never needed any gift from her, because Cleo herself was the greatest gift she could ever give her.

⁸ Helen Wells, "Contemporary Art and Inspiration," <https://helenwellsartist.com>

Now that the story was outlined, the character design could start. Each character needed to be unique, and the side characters couldn't outshine the main character. Since each character was based off of a different oceanic animal, it was easy enough to find inspiration and research regarding each animal. Since Cleo and the queen were based on the Lion's Mane Jellyfish, their color palette is all warm, which used the red, pink, and yellow hues that the jellyfish has. The humpback whales took a cooler tone for their skin and tails, and their characters are at least 40 to 50 feet tall. On the opposite spectrum, the hermit crab mother is around four inches tall and is similar to Cleo's coloring. The goblin shark mermaid is about the same height as Cleo, four feet tall; he also has more purple and pink hues for his coloring.

Up to this point, it was already two months into the project, and it was time to start storyboarding the book. It was decided that *Cleo's Crown* was going to be a 32-paged book with a total of 16 fully illustrated spreads. To begin, the cover was the very first piece that was sketched out; it needed to encompass the overall feel of the book and serve as a guideline for the rest of the finished spreads. After many revisions and different layouts, the cover was done, and the inside spreads could be addressed.

Next, the finished draft of *Cleo's Crown* was arranged on specific spreads to make the story have a natural flow from page to page. After this, the storyboards were created. The boards contained extremely loose sketches, meaning stick figures and general shapes, of each page layout. From there, all the spreads were roughed

out further into a general sketch where the characters and setting could be clear. Once the sketches were complete and the story made sense with the illustrations, the final linework was started.

From this point on, all work completed was done on a tablet using Adobe Fresco. While beginning the final linework for each illustration, it was important to use different sized brushes for various sections of the layout. For example, the main outlines such as the head and body were done with thicker strokes while the small details of the eyes and lips were done with thinner strokes. This helped differentiate the important details of the illustration. It also helped the piece, so it didn't become jumbled and confusing.

Once each spread was outlined, each section of the illustration, (skin, hair, and background) was masked so there wouldn't be any bleed onto another section when coloring it. Each piece of the spread was painted using various watercolor paintbrushes, textures, and overlays. After each spread was completed, edits were made to make sure each spread fit the others in terms of style and color. Finally, the type could be placed. Each spread already had pockets where the type would fit, so it was relatively easy to place the story within the spreads.

One of the main challenges of this project was finding the perfect solution to exhibit the book. Since *Cleo's Crown* is a children's book the best situation would be to print it and have an exhibition showcasing the process and finished piece, but with COVID-19 hitting in 2020 and still present in 2021, having a printed book with people

constantly touching it and spreading germs wasn't ideal. Instead of having an in-person exhibition, *Cleo's Crown* was promoted online with a website. The website, cleoscrown.com, contains the full story and process for *Cleo's Crown*. Under the process tab, there is a time-lapse video of one of the spreads to show just exactly how the illustrations were completed.

Once the website was done, *Cleo's Crown* was promoted across several social media platforms. Before the opening date, several sneak peeks of the book were sent out to gain interest. On April 1, 2021, *Cleo's Crown* opened for public viewing. The website was sent out via email to the students at the Myers School of Art, and it was shared through Instagram and Facebook. Reaching out to family and friends, *Cleo's Crown* was shared to even more people. Although a physical exhibition wasn't possible, a couple copies of *Cleo's Crown* were ordered to see the finished piece in the form it was planned for. In the future, hopefully *Cleo's Crown* will be presented to potential publishers using the printed copy.

Throughout this whole process, *Cleo's Crown* brought a greater appreciation for authors and illustrators. On the outside, it seems like a simple process; when in reality, it requires research and constant revisions. A spread would be "completed," and days later, a small imperfection would catch the eye and need revision. Even though parts of the process were trial and error, it was a fun and wonderful experience to complete this project.

Although *Cleo's Crown* is a children's book, it was still designed with adults in mind. Hopefully when adults see the art of *Cleo's Crown*, they are reminded of the beauty in life and share it with others. When parents and or guardians read this book with their children, the hope is that they will be able to fall in love with the book and share wonderful moments to remember forever.

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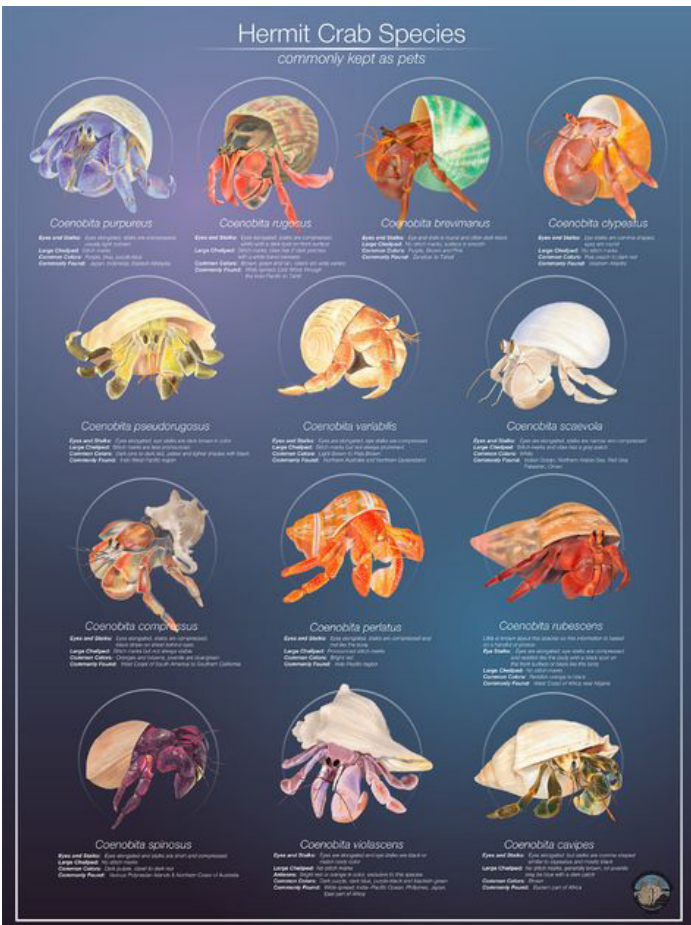


Images

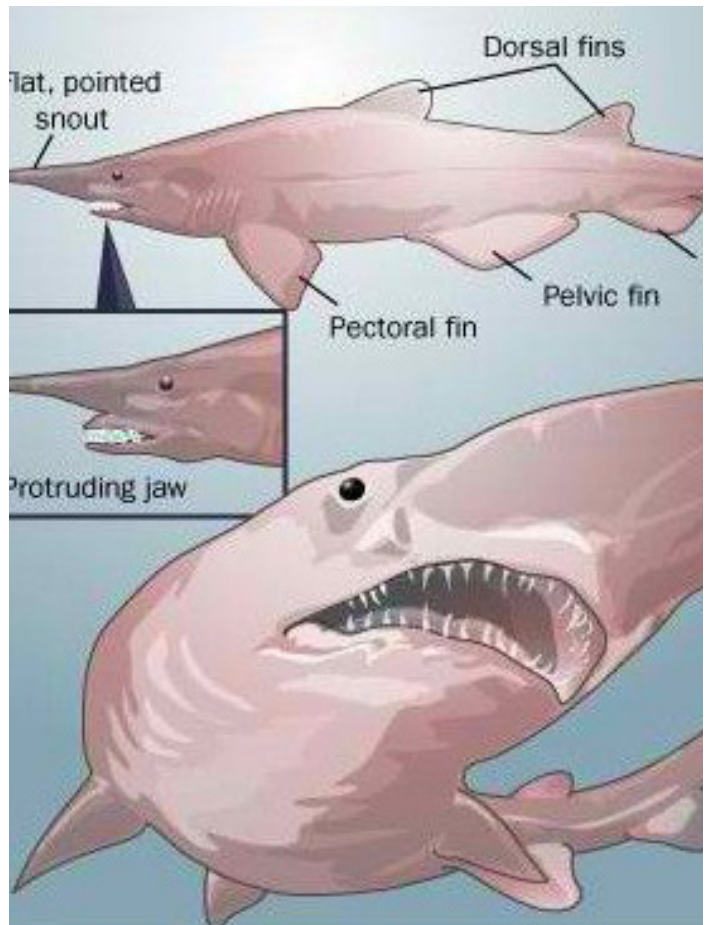
Lion's Mane Jellyfish



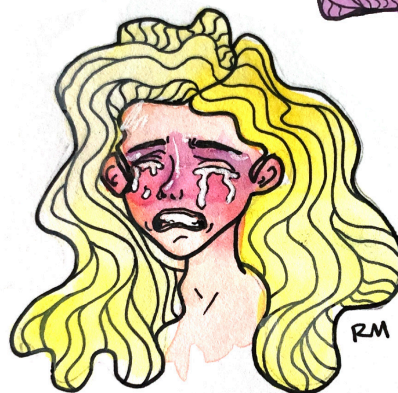
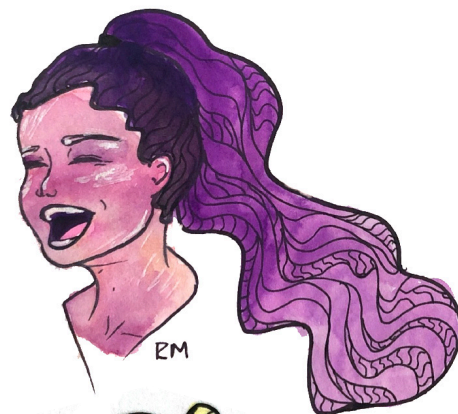
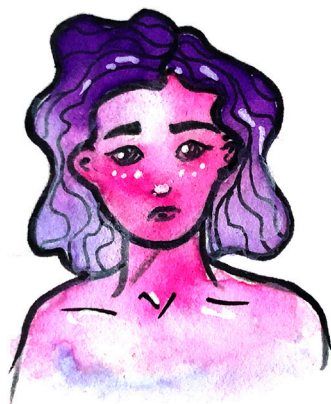
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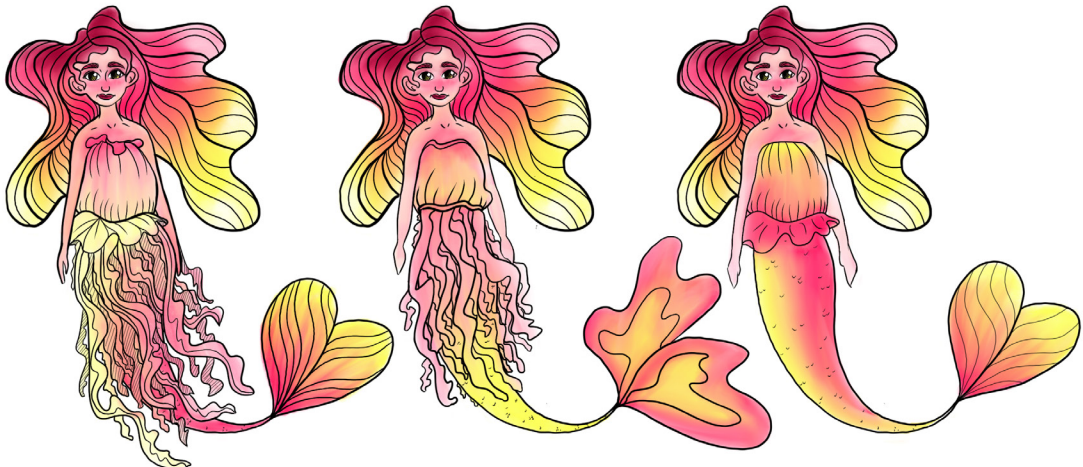
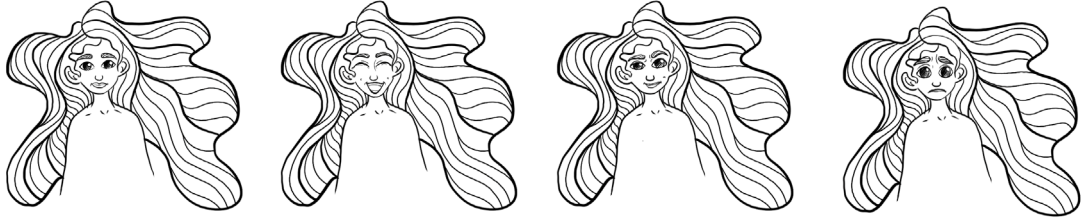
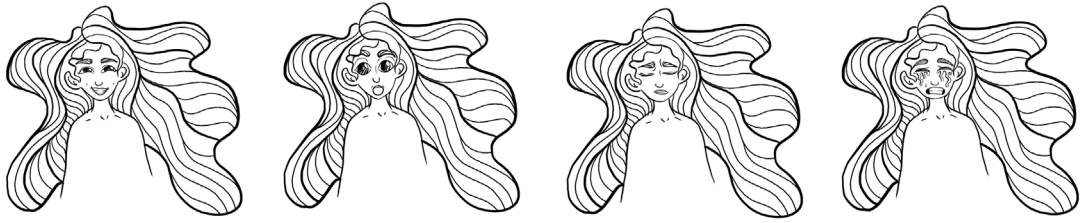


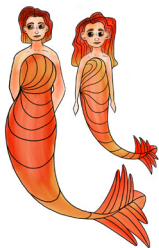
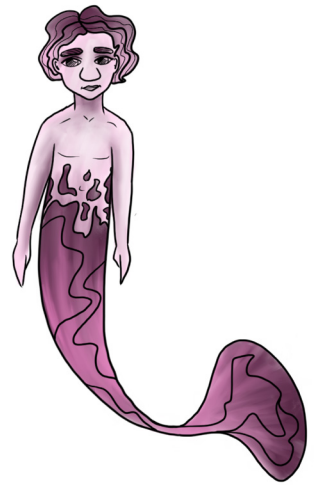
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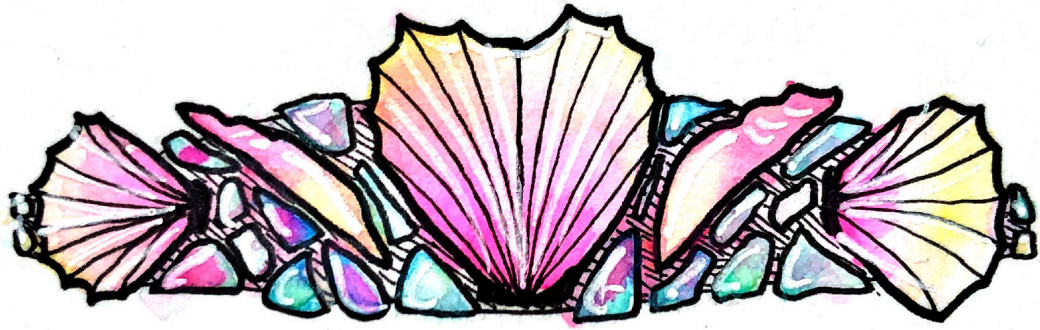


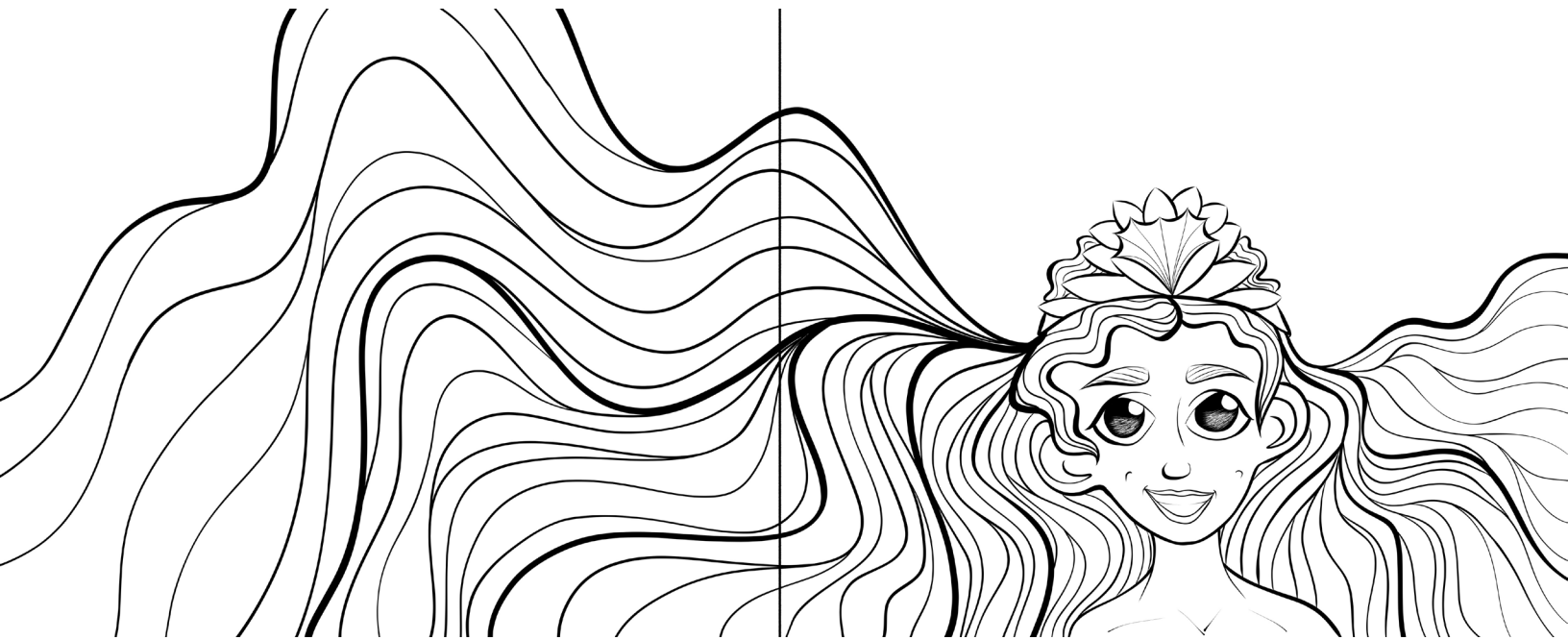
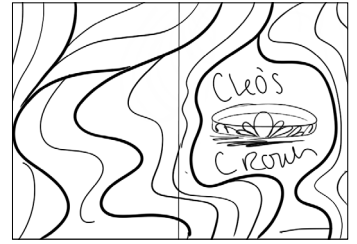
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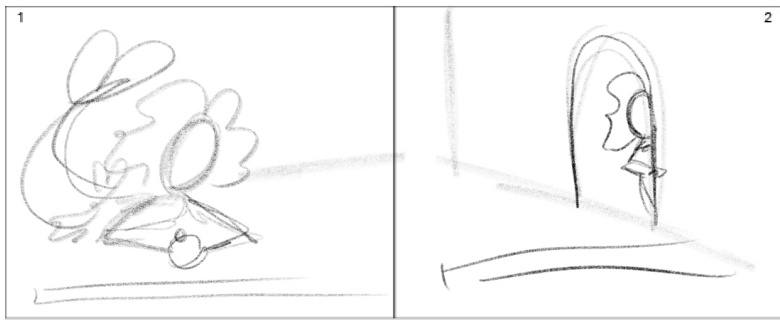




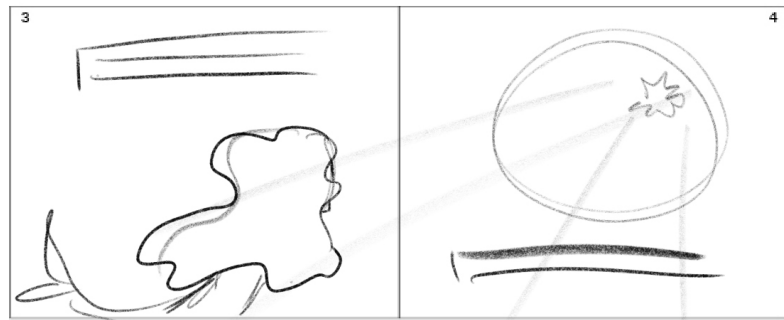




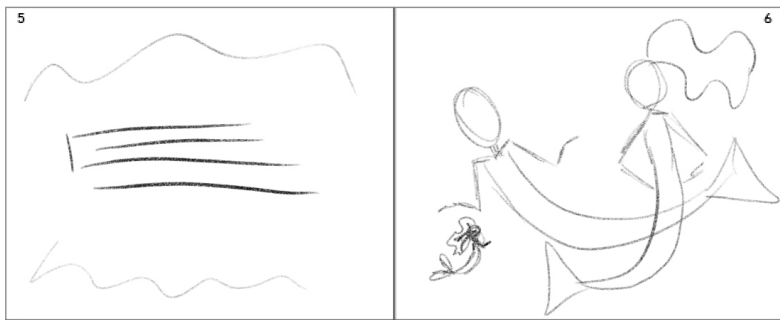




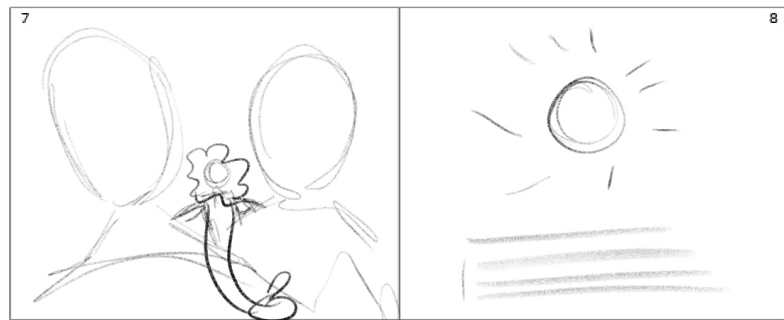
It's the queen's birthday!
 But wait – something's missing!
 "Cleo, have you seen your mom's crown?" a mermaid peaks in Cleo's room.
 "Is it lost?" Cleo asks.
 "Yes, we have to keep looking! We'll see you tonight!"



Cleo looks down at her half finished present. It's not as fancy as a crown.
 "Momma won't want this." Cleo sighs.
 Then, out of her window, she sees a glimmer of light. It glints like a diamond in the water, and Cleo swims outside to see what it is.



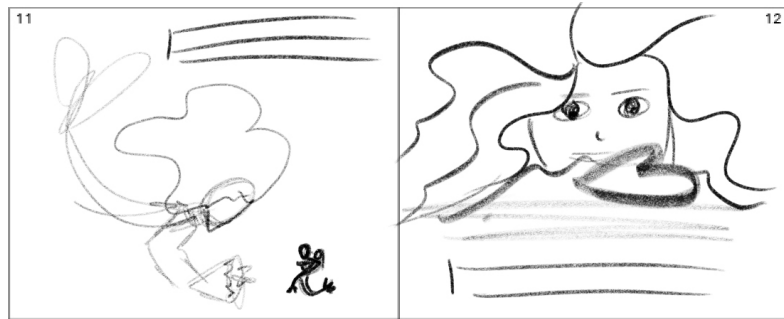
How can you forget? We have to practice before the party tonight!" Two whale mermaids swim in circles around each other, also looking for something.
 "It has to be around here somewhere...we're not far."
 "E-excuse me!" Cleo squeaks. These mermaids are so big!



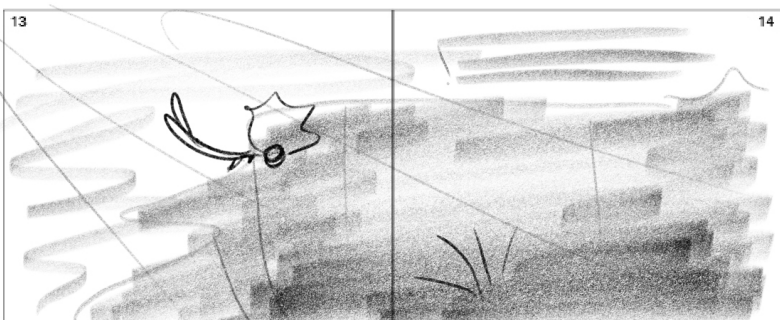
"You're very pretty. Are you a queen?" Cleo swims up to them.
 "Awww, thank you! No, I'm a dancer for the party. Do you know where our stage is?" The woman asks.
 "Yes, this way! It's Momma's party!"
 "Yay! Are you excited?"
 "...I don't have a good enough gift for her."
 "Will this help, princess?" She reaches for her ring and gives it to Cleo.



The mermaid's ring was as big as the princess's head, but Cleo knew it would do the trick. She quickly thanks the pair, and rushes away. She has an idea!
 The ocean floor is full of beautiful shells, and she quickly searches the sand for the best shell.
 "Ah ha!" Cleo finds a perfect conch, but as she looks at it, she realizes it's much too large!



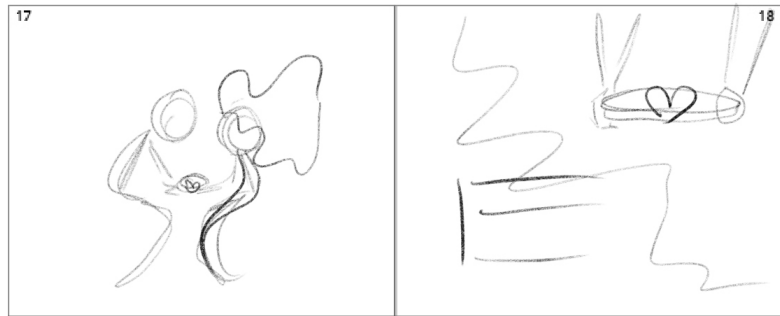
Nearby, Cleo sees a small hermit crab, who asks for the shell.
 "I'll trade you some of mine! I've been looking for a bigger house."
 "Oh alright! Here you go!" Cleo puts the conch down next to her.
 Cleo searches through the pile, and finds a pretty heart shaped shell.
 "Perfect!" she exclaims.



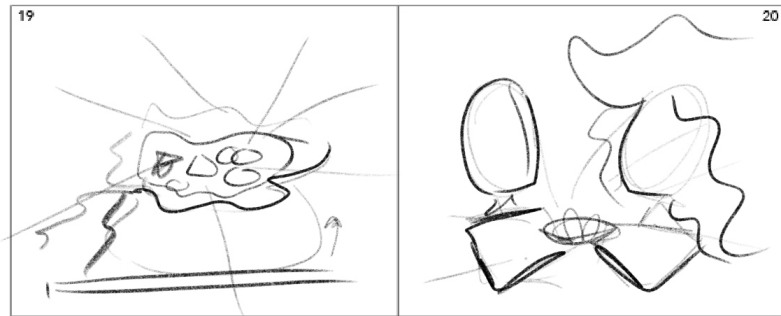
As she swims away, Cleo begins to hear a small crying noise.
 "Hello?"
 The deep ocean is dark, and at first, Cleo is scared. She's never gone so far from the castle, and she doesn't know if she'll find her way back. The crying gets louder. The little princess journeys deeper and finds a young boy sitting on the sand.



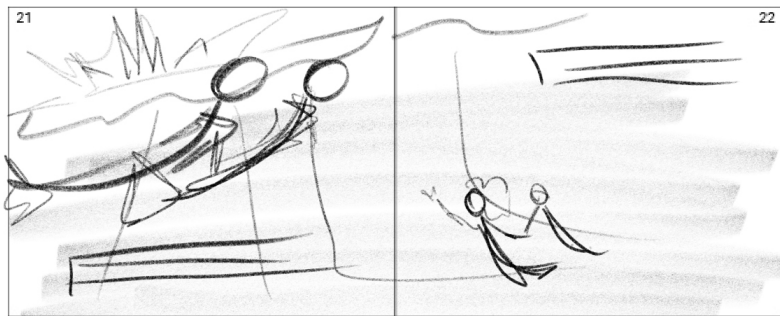
"Why are you so sad?"
 "My friends made fun of me. They said my nose was too big." The boy sniffles.
 "What's wrong with big noses?" Cleo tilts her head to look at the boy's nose.
 He turns his face to the side and says, "S-see?"
 "Well I think you're very pretty."



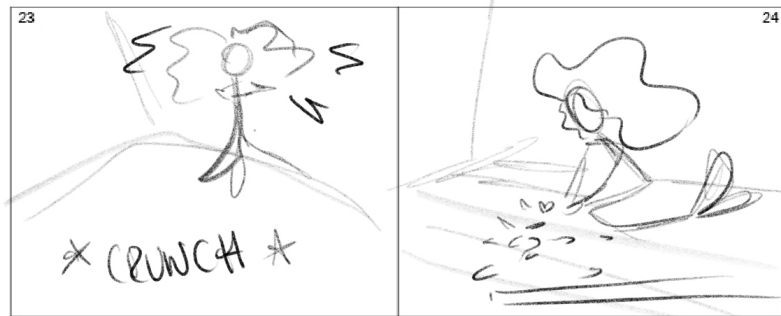
Cleo sits down next to him, and brings out her crown.
 "I wish my crown was pretty."
 "I like it."
 "It needs something more." Cleo turns it over in her hands to inspect it.



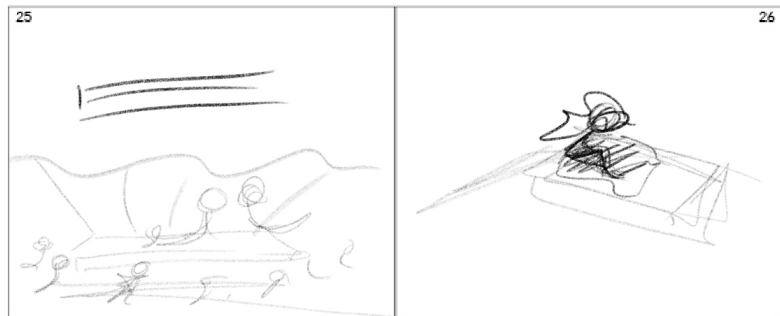
"Will these help?" He pulls a handful of sea glass from his pouch.
 "Wow! Can I have some?"
 "Here, I'll help you put them on."
 Both of them start attaching the sea glass to the crown, "See? Now it's even prettier!"
 "Yay! Thank you!" Cleo gives the boy a big hug and takes his hand. It was time to return to the castle.
 "Come on! Let's go to the party!"



As they get close to the castle, Cleo and the boy begin to hear music and mermaids laughing.
 The princess swims to the stage, where her whale friends have been practicing.
 "Hello! This is my new friend!" Cleo pulls the boy beside her.
 "Hi-hi..." He gives a small wave.
 "I have to go give this to Momma, see you later!" Cleo giggles, rushing through the halls faster than she's ever swam before. She's so fast that when she turns the corner, she runs right into a wall.



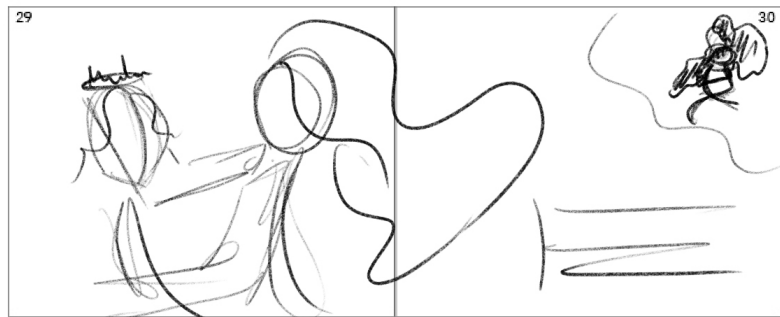
CRUNCH
 "Oh no!"
 Cleo clutches the heart shaped shell which is the only thing on the crown that isn't broken.
 Grasping the shell, Cleo swims to her room.



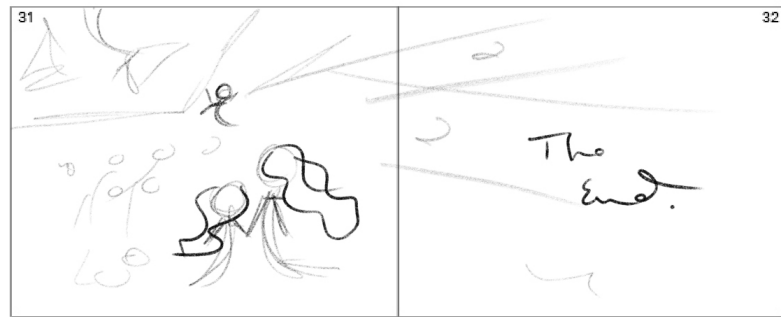
The party is starting! But where's Cleo?
 "Cleo?"
 "I'm sorry Momma." Cleo hides behind her blanket.
 "What's wrong, sweetie?" The queen gently pulls Cleo into her arms.



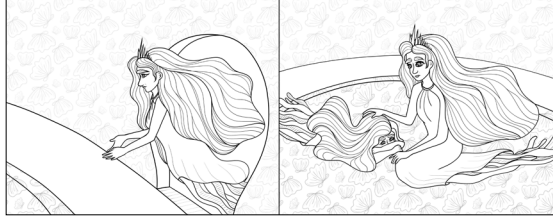
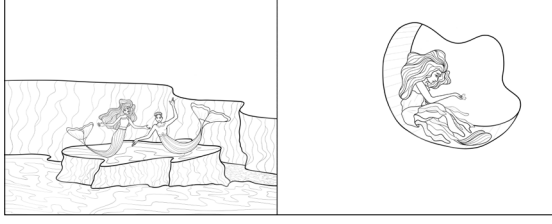
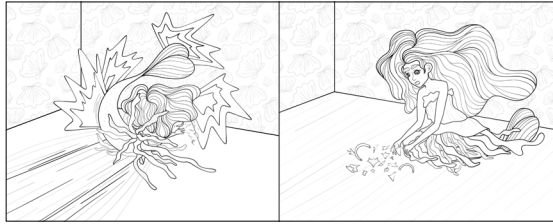
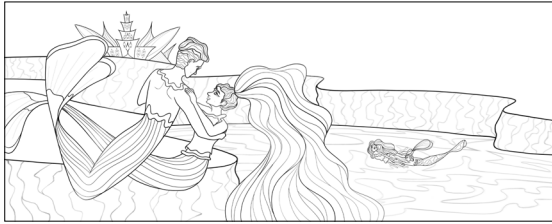
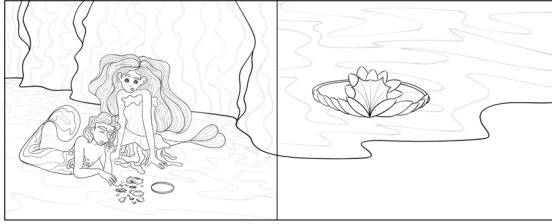
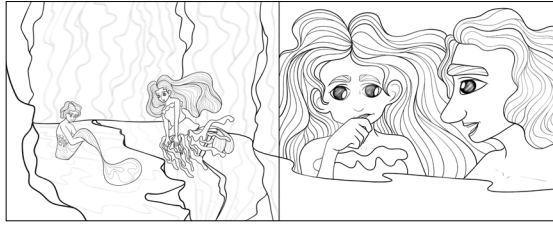
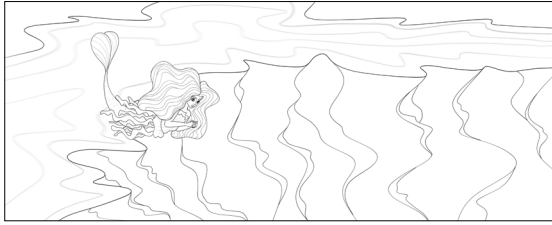
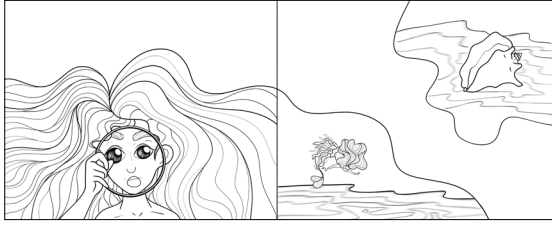
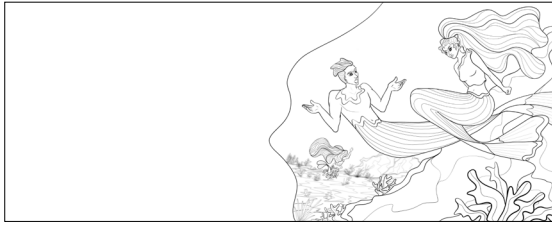
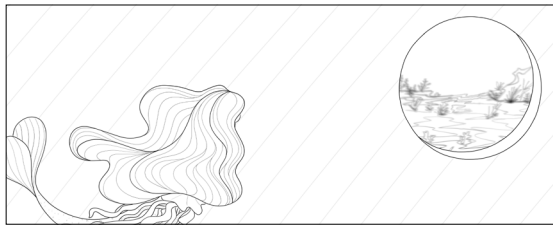
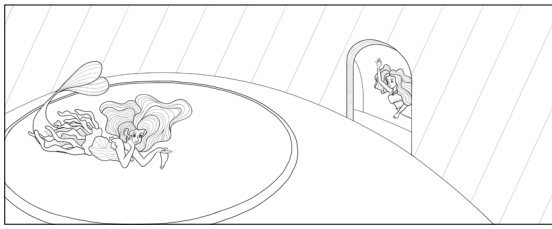
"I made you a crown, but I broke it." Cleo sobs, "B-but you found yours! I don't have a present anymore, though."
 "Let's see...well, how about this?" The queen reaches for the heart-shaped shell, "Cleo, it's beautiful!"
 "R-really?"
 "Of course....but not as beautiful as you." She pinches Cleo's nose.

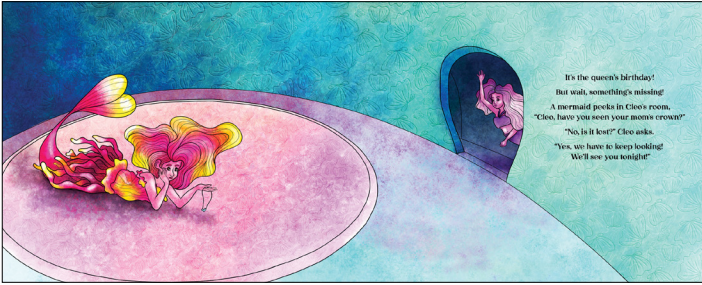


"I love you, Momma."
 "I love you too, Cleo."
 The queen takes off her crown, places it on Cleo's head, and pins her own hair back with the shell.
 "Thank you for the shell, Cleo. I love it. But my greatest gift is you."



The End.



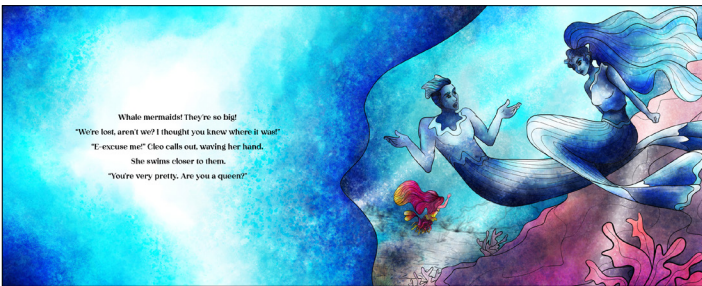


It's the queen's birthday!
But wait, something's missing!
A mermaid peeks in Cleo's room.
"Cleo, have you seen your mom's crown?"
"No, is it lost?" Cleo asks.
"Yes, we have to keep looking!
We'll see you tonight!"

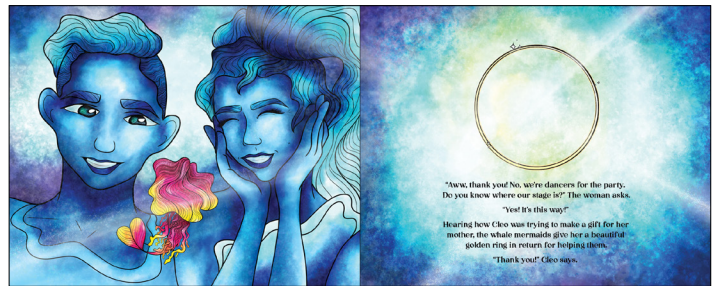


Cleo looks down at the necklace she was making for her Mom and sighs.
"This is not so pretty as a crown."

Then, outside her window, Cleo spots something moving in the water. What could it be?



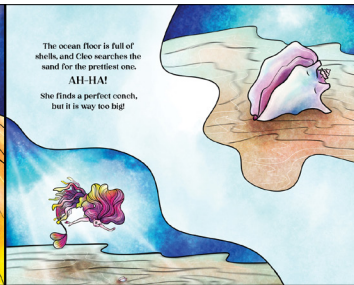
Whale mermals! They're so big!
"We're lost, aren't we? I thought you knew where it was!"
"I excuse me!" Cleo calls out, waving her hand.
She swims closer to them.
"You're very pretty. Are you a queen?"



"Wow, thank you! No, we're dancers for the party.
Do you know where our stage is?" The woman asks.
"You're right way!"
Hearing how Cleo was trying to make a gift for her mother, the whale mermals give her a beautiful golden ring in return for helping them.
"Thank you!" Cleo says.



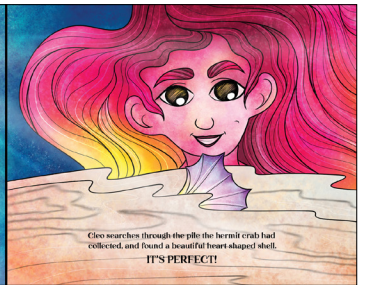
The mermaid's ring is as big as her head!
It gives Cleo an idea.



The ocean floor is full of shells, and Cleo searches the sand for the prettiest one.
AHH!
She finds a perfect conch, but it is way too big!



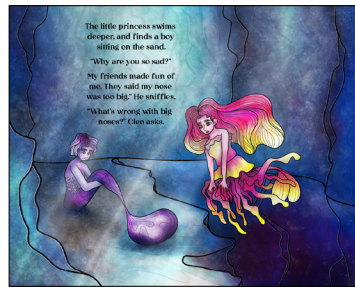
Seeing the shell, a small hermit crab swims up to Cleo.
"Hello! I've been looking for a bigger house. Can I have that one?
You can take some of mine!"
"Okay!" Cleo agrees, handing over her conch shell.



Cleo searches through the pile the hermit crab had collected, and found a beautiful heart-shaped shell.
IT'S PERFECT!!



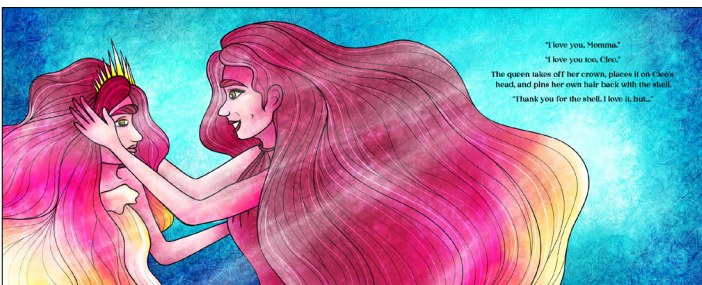
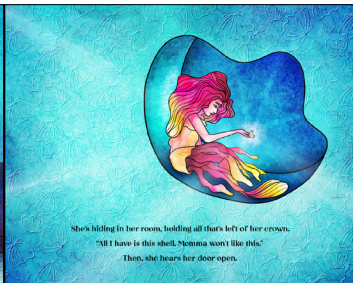
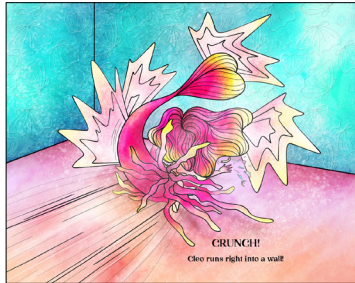
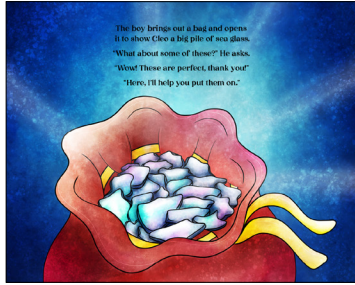
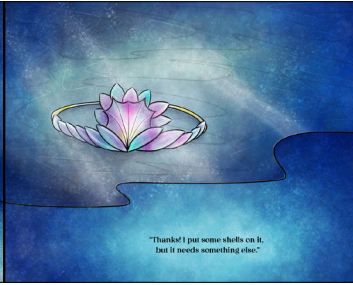
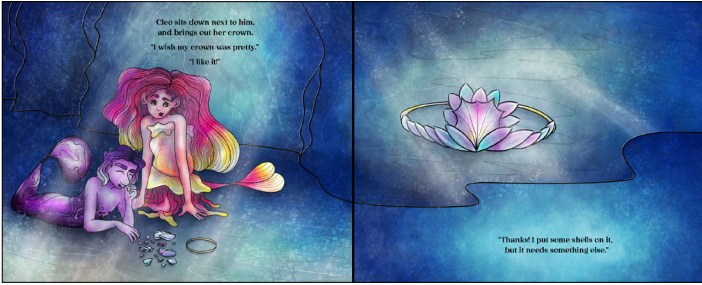
As she swims away, Cleo begins to hear a small crying noise.
The deep ocean is dark, and at first, Cleo is scared.
She's never gone so far from the castle, and she doesn't know if she'll find her way back.
But who's crying?



The little princess swims deeper, and finds a boy sitting on the sand.
"Why are you so sad?"
My friends made fun of me. They said my nose was too big," he sniffles.
"What's wrong with big noses?" Cleo asks.



He turns his face to the side and says, "See?"
"Well I think you're very pretty," Cleo says.



cleo's crown

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Rachael & Bernadette Mion

About Us

We are sisters who grew up with a passion for art and writing and would spend hours sitting and creating our own magical worlds to get lost in. Some of our most cherished memories stem from our love of stories and growing up in a large family with many nieces and nephews who felt the same. We felt it was time to start experimenting with children's books.

For *Cleo's Crown*, both of us brainstormed and created the story, while Rachael completed all the illustrations as part of her senior honors project.

