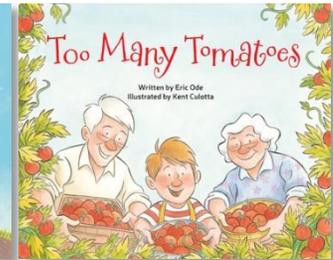
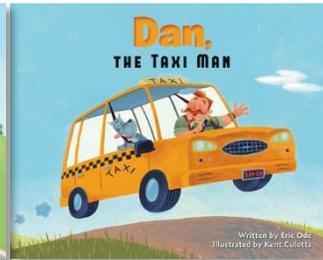
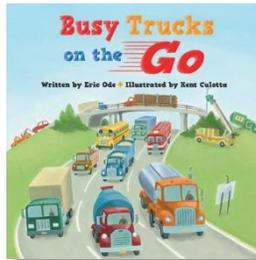


*KENT CULOTTA is the illustrator of three picture books published by Kane Miller: [Busy Trucks on the Go](#); [Dan, the Taxi Man](#), and [Too Many Tomatoes](#), all written by Eric Ode.*



**Kane Miller Books:** What role did books and reading play in your home as a child? Was reading a form of entertainment?

**Kent Culotta:** Oh yes! My parents read to us all the time until we started reading on our own. We had almost complete collections of the *Winnie the Pooh* and *Beatrix Potter* books, as well as plenty of picture books.

**KMB:** Have you always been generally drawn to visual imagery, or do illustrations appeal to you specifically?

**KC:** I would have to say visual imagery in general. From an early age, we were taken to the Detroit Institute of Arts. I suppose that may have bored some kids, but my brother and I loved it. I was also a big fan of animated cartoons. I would say that art that told a story was always the most interesting to me.

**KMB:** Do you recall the moment in which you appreciated that “illustrator” was a job title?

**KC:** I was always drawing, and I think from the age of about four or five years old I knew that I was going to be an artist of some kind. I officially decided that I was going to be an "author and illustrator" at the age of eight years old. That soon morphed into wanting to be an animator, which I did, (and still occasionally do).

**KMB:** What are the unique challenges and opportunities in illustrating for children?

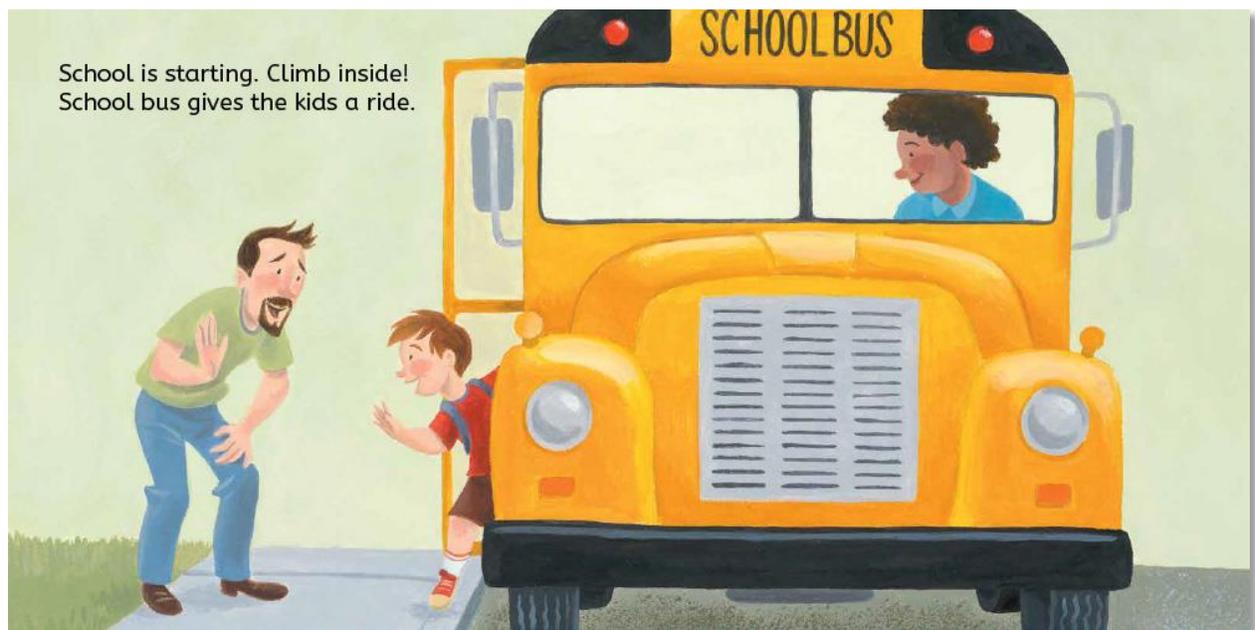
**KC:** Ooh, that's a hard question. There's a rule in animation that I think also applies to illustrating for children. Make sure to stage your scene so that the action is clear and easy to read. Draw your character so that you know what they're thinking and what they're doing instantly by their pose and facial expression. The advantage to book illustration is that your audience is going to spend more time looking at a single image, so you can add in details for...



**KC continued:** ...them to discover at their own speed. That is, as long as the details don't detract from the main point of the illustration.

**KMB:** This is the third Kane Miller book you've done with Eric Ode (*Busy Trucks on the Go*; *Dan, the Taxi Man*, *Too Many Tomatoes*). Describe the process of interpreting another's words into illustrations.

**KC:** Good question. I'm always concerned about finding a visual story or flow that will match and enhance Eric's words. Sometimes that's relatively easy and sometimes not. *Dan, the Taxi Man* has an obvious through line so it was pretty simple to have the images tell the story of going from day to night as Dan picks up the band members. *Busy Trucks on the Go* was a tougher nut to crack. Eric's manuscript is a series of verses about all the different kinds of trucks. As the illustrator, I was asked to have a family who were looking at the trucks, but it took me a while to figure out that I could have the visual story happen over the course of a year as a father and son indulge their fascination with trucks. It was the lines about the school bus that clued me in – the passage of time over a school year – and then I got excited about being able to show the different seasons through the course of the book.



**KMB:** In *Too Many Tomatoes*, are there any panels or elements that you particularly like?

**KC:** One of my favorite parts of *Too Many Tomatoes* is the section where the different recipients of the tomatoes are listed. I felt that a series of smaller illustrations suggested the rhythm of the list, but I wanted to give each of those characters a little "weight" by suggesting a story or a joke in those vignettes. I especially liked the tailor's confusion between the real...



**KC continued:** ...tomato and the pin cushion, and the idea that the little boy might have a crush on the girl with the book. I also like how the list builds up to the big finale of the parade and dinner at the end.



**KMB:** Describe an average work day. Do you draw inspiration from any daily rituals?

**KC:** I think my only daily ritual is lots and lots of coffee in the morning! I probably have a few different kinds of "average" work day, depending on what stage I'm at in creating the illustrations. When I was doing the sketches for my current book I was also working a day job in animation, so my sketching hours were in the evening and during weekends. I try not to be doing anything else, though, when I'm doing final artwork.

**KMB:** Finally, pick up the book closest to you. What is it? We'll end with a little mystery...

**KC:** I have lots of picture and art books on a shelf right next to my desk for inspiration. One of those is . . . *The Creative Habit*, by Twyla Tharp.

**KMB:** Thanks for the chat, Kent!

---

Visit Kent Culotta at [www.kentculotta.com](http://www.kentculotta.com).

Visit Kane Miller Books at [www.kanemiller.com](http://www.kanemiller.com), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#).