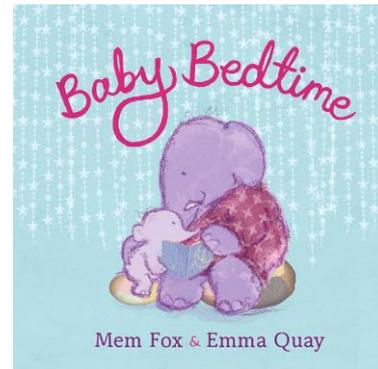


# Baby Bedtime

ILLUSTRATOR NOTES  
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Written by Mem Fox and illustrated by Emma Quay  
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## SYNOPSIS

The text takes the form of a monologue: the voice of a parent talking gently, playfully and lovingly to a young child as he/she takes him/her to bed. This parent elephant carries the baby from the sitting room, through the hall, up the stairs and into the baby’s bedroom, where they close the blinds, dim the lighting, choose a book to read, and share a story together before the baby goes to bed.

There is a lot of love involved in this simple bedtime ritual.

## ILLUSTRATIVE APPROACH

I have intentionally not specified the gender of either character in my illustrations—even I don’t know whether the parent elephant is a mum or a dad, or whether the baby is male or female. My decision to use anthropomorphism in the depiction of the characters as elephants helped with this aim. My intention was that this could be any parent and child, of any heritage, sex or age. (I hope you will excuse the use of “he/she” and “his/her” throughout these notes. I really don’t know which they are!)

When I started sketching ideas for the characters, I experimented with both the anthropomorphic approach (drawing various animal parents and their young), but I also tried drawing sample illustrations with human characters. I knew I liked the elephants best, so I was happy when Mem Fox, Laura Harris (the publisher and editor at Penguin Books), and Selwa Anthony (my agent) unanimously agreed. Elephants, it was!

And perhaps it was always going to be elephants. Early on, when I was discussing the project with my friend, writer Lisa Shanahan, she remembered a Christmas card I had drawn years before. The picture showed the back view of a parent elephant carrying its sleepy baby off to bed, through a beaded curtain hung with stars. Lisa said she still used the card as a bookmark, and it made her smile every time she looked at it. The starry beaded curtain made it into this book, hung at the doorway to the baby’s bedroom. I used it as a decorative device, but also to symbolise the threshold between day and night, play and rest, wakefulness and sleep, through which the two elephants must pass on their way to the baby’s bed.

The beginning of the book is filled with the lively colours of the living areas of the house—the sitting room, hall, stairwell and landing are decorated in bright and warm hues reminiscent of those popular in 1970s interiors, often with busy, loud and large patterns. By contrast, when we enter the baby’s bedroom (through the beaded curtain), the wall is a muted and calm blue, with clear and quiet whites accompanying it.

When I started to think about how to approach the illustrations for this book, I knew I wanted to try to convey a feeling of warmth and security—of being loved and cared for. I thought about my own childhood and the moments when I felt most secure and loved. I found myself thinking about the times, late at night after dinner parties at friends’ houses, when my dad would carry my sister and me, half asleep, to the car. I held on to that feeling throughout the illustrative process, and tried to pour into my pictures some of the feelings of warmth, comfort and security those memories evoked. I filled the images with texture—the weave of linen, hessian and baskets, the patterns of printed fabric, lace, embroidery, knitting and crochet. A young child’s world is a very tactile place, and his or her experience of it is as much about touch as it is about sight and sound. I wanted to reflect this in my images, despite their being destined to be printed onto the essentially smooth and two-dimensional pages of a picture book. I hoped to convey a sense of softness, cosiness, warmth and envelopment through my choice of colours and shapes, the qualities of the drawn lines and the textured surfaces.

I used found materials in the book, scouring charity shops and buying various items to scan for their textures, shapes and patterns, including aprons, lace, crocheted doilies and tablemats, handkerchiefs, baskets, a suede belt and knitted toys. A small basket made a good cradle, the edging on the sleeves of a flimsy, peach-coloured bed jacket became a string of fairy lights (lit with the aid of Photoshop) and an embroidered gingham apron decorated the baby’s bedclothes. A knitted ball became the large and small ottomans on which the characters share a bedtime story, and an embroidered doily formed the rug at their feet. The stripes on a hanky made wall panelling on the landing and woven fabric textures filled every available space.

I liked the thought that as well as my drawing and painting, the book would also contain the handiwork of many other people—it would be filled with their history too.

Continuing the theme of softness, there are no straight lines in the book (the cut edges of the pages excepted). The letters of the typeface have wobbly edges, as does the zigzag ironwork of the banisters (using woolly thread from a doily), and the window frames (the hemmed edge of a handkerchief). The toy box in the bedroom has rounded (sewn and stitched) corners, and even the toy car inside it is soft and stuffed.

There are no drawn outlines in the background of the illustrations; only the elephant characters (and the baby elephant, moon and stars on the cover of their bedtime book) are outlined, and for this I used loose, grainy pencil lines—purple for the parent and child. I filled in the outlines (often extending beyond their boundaries) with loosely brushed purple paint, adding more colour on the parent elephant and on the dressing gown with finger painting. The pattern on the parent’s dressing gown was taken from the fine criss-cross detail on some lace from a hand-sewn apron. The pattern reminded me of bedtime kisses, and therefore it seemed an appropriate choice.

I filled the house with various types of lights in the different rooms, including a wall-mounted reading spotlight, a spherical pendant lampshade and a cluster of hanging lights in the stairwell. I hoped to clearly differentiate between the brightly-lit rooms of daytime and the change when the lights are dimmed and it is time to sleep. The circular orange cushion on the rattan chair in the sitting room resembles the setting sun.

Each week, I play the flute with my pianist friend Byrnece, and I pass the box of toys she has knitted for her grandchildren on my way to the music room. I borrowed some of her knitting for the book, and also

commissioned her to knit a star for me to use for the beaded curtains. I had been unable to find a five-pointed star that didn't have straight edges and sharp points. Byrnece's knitted star has been reduced in size so much for the beads, it is impossible to tell it is knitted at all, and yet it retains the rounded, uneven, hand-made qualities I was seeking.

I prepared the illustrations on a PC in my studio at home, and presented the finished artworks on disk as 300dpi CMYK Tiff files.

## THE STORYTELLING

My recent picture book title, *Rudie Nudie*, is full of energy, its characters skipping, spinning and leaping through the pages after their bath. Although *Baby Bedtime* is set at the same time of day, its energy is very different. The parent is tired after a long day, and the baby is beginning to droop too. The characters are slow moving, calm and sleepy. It is a lullaby of a picture book. As I worked on the illustrations, I imagined this being the last book parents might read before kissing their children good night. The storytelling is beautifully calm and unhurried—Mem Fox takes her time to say everything.

*“I could eat your little ears.*

*I could nibble on your nose.*

*I could munch your tiny fingers.*

*I could gobble up your toes.”*

In the first section of the book, each line begins with “*I could*”; in the accompanying illustrations I made sure I never depicted the parent character doing the action mentioned, but instead *almost* doing it, or doing something related to it. The parent is gently tugging one of the baby's ears, almost but not quite nibbling the baby's trunk, nearing the baby's hands with his/her lips, then curling his/her trunk around the baby's feet.

When the parent elephant says, “*I could gaze at you all night*”, we see the baby's reflection in the windowpane as the elephants close the blinds. People often ask me which illustration in each book was the most difficult. In *Baby Bedtime*, it was this one! I ended up making Plasticine models of the two elephants and posing them in front of a mirror, to work out how to draw the reflection.

To illustrate the line “*I could whisper lots of stories till the darkness turns to light*”, I knew I wanted to refer to the important storytelling and book-sharing ritual of bedtime (as the parent reaches for a book from the shelf with his/her trunk), but also to the changing light. It is here that the main light in the bedroom is dimmed and the fairy lights begin to gently glow.

In illustrating “*I could stroke your silky hair*”, instead of the parent actually touching the baby's hair, he/she is blowing gently through his/her trunk to ruffle the few soft strands on the top of the baby's head. For “*I could sit you on my knee*”, the baby leans his/her head on the parent's lap during the bedtime story, and “*I could sing you all the songs that my mother sang to me*” has the baby's mouth wide open for a yawn rather than for song. In the illustration for “*I could listen to you breathing*”, the end of the baby's little trunk comes close to the enormous ear of the parent elephant as he/she readies the blankets for bedtime, and for “*I could pat your precious head*”

the parent’s long trunk curves just above the baby’s forehead, echoing its rounded shape.

As the parent turns to walk away from the bed, he/she looks back and parent and child reach out to one another to illustrate the final “*could*” line of the text: “*I could hold your hand in my hand as I sit beside your bed*”.

With the sentence, “*But there comes a time for sleeping, and our sleepy time is now*”, the narrative focus shifts, in a way that is beautifully mirrored in the rhythm of the text. Only at this point could I allow my pictures to start to directly illustrate the actions described in the written text, as the parent talks about what must happen instead of what could, and the baby finally surrenders to sleep. I have drawn the elephants on the same scale from page 5 to page 11, then as they enter the bedroom and bedtime nears we begin to get closer to the two characters, zooming in gradually with each page turn, until we are up close for the final illustration as the baby falls asleep with a good-night kiss.

In my illustrations, I wanted to show positive images of books being a part of everyday life. While a reader and child are sharing this picture book, the characters in the book also enjoy a bedtime story together. At the beginning of the book, in the sitting room, there is a pile of large-format books on the coffee table and I also left a paperback on the rattan chair, to which the parent elephant will return once the baby has settled. I see it as my own gentle kind of pro-reading propaganda!

## **TYPOGRAPHIC AND DESIGN DECISIONS**

There is a lot of dense colour and pattern in the illustrations for this book, but instead of extending the colour and pattern of the pictures across each entire double-page spread, I left clear spaces on the left-hand pages of the first ten openings for the designer Kirby Armstrong’s lovely, sympathetic type design. However, instead of these text pages being a stark, flat white, I introduced some warmth and colour by painting a wash of pigment taken from the corresponding illustration on the opposite page, and then painting over the whole left-hand page with semi-translucent white gesso. The pigment shows through the white paint in varying degrees.

When the baby is finally lifted into bed on pages 24-25, this pale text area starts to recede and the colour of the main illustration to spread onto the left-hand page. The pictures extend further and further to the left until, on the final double-page spread (pages 30-31), the artwork showing the baby’s bedroom, the baby in bed and the tired parent flopping his/her trunk across the end of it extends across both pages, filling the entire picture plane. As the pale text area gradually moves to the left across the verso pages, it is clear that the edge where white gesso meets colour illustration is not sharply cropped, straight and vertical, but wobbly and uneven with visible brushstrokes, adding another imperfect, hand-made quality to the book.

The internal typeface, used for the text of the story, is Antihistory, chosen partly for the gentle wavy edges to its letters, echoing the illustrative approach. The type is not black, but a soft purple colour to complement the hues of the illustrations.

I met with publisher Laura Harris and designer Kirby Armstrong from the very beginning of the project, and it was wonderful to have the designer’s input at this early stage. Kirby was pregnant at our first meetings, and by the end of the project she had a gorgeous baby girl of her own, Maeve. In-house designer, Bruno Herfst, stepped in to prepare the files for pre-press.

## COVER

The front cover illustration shows the moment when both characters agree it is time for bed. They have gone through the bedtime rituals, the bedtime story has been read, and parent and baby look at each other in agreement. It is not the same drawing as the one used for the story-reading page inside the book, but illustrates a few moments later. For the cover of the book, I didn't want to show the baby's bedroom background; instead I hoped to keep things simpler—more decorative. I used the starry beaded curtain motif as an abstract pattern behind the characters: its whiteness knocked back so as not to interfere with the title type or the tender moment between the sleepy elephants.

This is a bedtime book with a picture of a book being shared at bedtime on its cover, in which the book being read also appears to be about a baby elephant falling asleep!

Kirby painted the title with a brush, picking out the burgundy colour of the parent's dressing gown. Once more, I appreciated the hand-made quality this brought to the book—many hands contributing to the finished product.

The cover has a matte finish with spot UV gloss varnish picking out the title, *Baby Bedtime*, the author and illustrator names and also the starry beaded curtain on the front cover... and on the back cover, the glowing fairy lights as the baby gazes up at them, past the book's blurb. The padding on the covers adds to the tactile experience of holding the book—again, adding softness, calling to mind bedding, mattresses, a pillow...

## ENDPAPERS

With so much pattern and texture filling the pages of this book, I chose to keep the endpapers simple and uncluttered. In some of my other books I have used the endpapers to further the story, expanding on elements brought up in the written or visual text. However, for *Baby Bedtime* I knew I wanted a little quiet either side of the story. The warm terracotta complements the colours within, and the linen weave introduces some texture without being too busy or distracting.

## WORKING ON *BABY BEDTIME*

I first read the text for *Baby Bedtime* in September 2011. My agent, Selwa Anthony, sent it to me without mentioning the author's name. I knew immediately it was written by Mem Fox, and as soon as I started to read her words I began to see images in my head. I sketched ideas as they came to me while I was finishing the illustrations for my own picture book, *Not a Cloud in the Sky*, and started working on the initial storyboard for *Baby Bedtime* in earnest in August 2012. Ten months later I delivered the final artworks. It was an intense time, working on the illustrations for this book, but an absolute pleasure.

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