

IN CONVERSATION WITH MARTHA BROCKENBROUGH AND JUANA MARTINEZ-NEAL, AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR OF *A GIFT OF DUST*

How much did you know about Saharan plumes before working on this project?

M: All I knew was that I was curious about the image of dust I'd seen on the NASA website. I was curious about how it traveled from the desert to the rainforest. Curiosity is the superpower of sentient beings. As with every book I write, I followed my curiosity where it led, and I paid attention to things that put a thrill in my heart. Above all else, for me, learning is about the heart as much as it is about the head.

***A Gift of Dust* is full of fascinating facts about dust, including the fact that there is so much dust coming from the Sahara an astronaut can spot it from space. What is your favorite fact about dust?**

M: I love that this dust comes from fossils. These atoms are traveling across time—the once-living nourish the living. To me, that is so profound. Nothing in the natural world is wasted.

J: The fact that the dust touches us all is so powerful and moving. It made me want to work in this book.

Martha, this book includes extensive backmatter and additional resources. What kind of research did you do for this project?

M: This project required me to think like a three-year-old. Fossils? Of what? What color were they? What did they eat? I asked question after question and found my satisfaction in answers. I also wanted to make the weights and measures accessible kids (or at least fun), so I researched equivalents, something I learned to do when my daughter came home from pre-kindergarten with a photo of herself lying next to a stack of apples. She was sixteen apples tall!

Juana, you've illustrated works of both fiction and nonfiction. Does your process differ when you're illustrating a work of nonfiction?

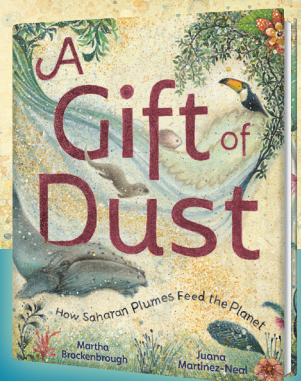
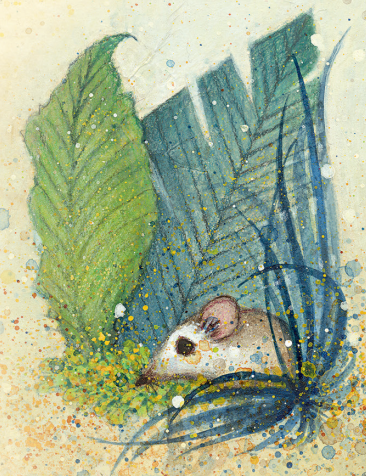
J: I do extensive research for my fiction and nonfiction work to illustrate the details included in the manuscripts, but sometimes I go beyond and find myself deep into a heap of visual references. For this book, I found myself looking at capybaras and hippos, astronauts and fossils, raindrops hitting a river, close-ups of dust, and more. I soaked it all in and filtered what I had found into my illustrations.



Photo courtesy of Martha Brockenbrough



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