

The Prescott Girls – Study Guide

Creating the Illustrations

The Art of *The Prescott Girls*

The illustrations in *The Prescott Girls* were created to help readers imagine what life may have looked like for the Prescott sisters in Maine during the 1830s.

Before photography existed, books often included drawings or engravings that helped readers picture people, places, and daily life. These illustrations were an important part of storytelling.

In this book, the artwork was created using a combination of historical research and modern tools. The goal was to produce images that feel similar to the illustrations found in nineteenth-century books.



Character Studies

Before creating scenes for the book, the characters were studied carefully so their appearance would remain consistent throughout the story.

Artists often create **character studies** to explore how a person might look from different angles and in different situations.

Examples of characters explored in these studies include:

- Hannah, a Quaker friend of the Prescott girls
- Reverend Freeman Parker
- Aunt Nancy Johnson
- Mr. Dodge, the beekeeper
- Mrs. Charity Price, an abolitionist
- Moses Morse, a local weaver

Creating these studies helps keep characters recognizable throughout a book.



Searching for the Right Art Style

At first, a painted style of illustration was explored. However, when printed on the page, these darker images did not reproduce clearly.

Because of this, a search began for a different visual style that would print more clearly while still fitting the historical setting of the story.

Several approaches were tested before settling on the styles used in the final book.

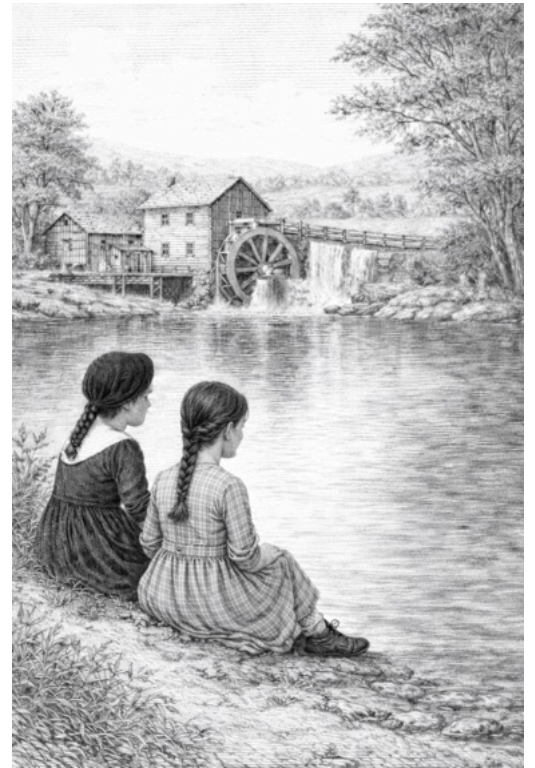


Two Illustration Styles

The finished book uses two related illustration styles.

Graphite Pencil Illustrations

These appear at the beginning of chapters and focus on emotional moments in the story. Pencil drawings allow softer shading and expressive detail that help readers connect with the characters.



Wood-Engraving Inspired Illustrations

These appear within chapters and are inspired by the wood engravings often printed in nineteenth-century books. These images use lines and textures to create shading using black ink on paper.

Using two styles helps balance emotional scenes with historical atmosphere.

Using Real Historical Spaces

The Old Pownalborough Court House in Dresden, Maine plays an important role in the story.

In many ways, the building is almost like another character in the book.

To help create accurate scenes, photographs and historical references of the courthouse were studied carefully. These references helped guide the design of interior rooms, windows, and furnishings.



Studying real historical places helps create scenes that feel authentic.

Creating the Final Illustration

After character studies, historical research, and style experiments, the final illustrations were composed.

This stage brings together:

- the characters
- the historical setting
- lighting and mood
- the moment being shown in the story

Digital artists often revise images several times before reaching a final composition that works well for the story.

In many cases, creating a final illustration required multiple revisions. Small details such as clothing folds, hairstyles, furniture, and room layout were adjusted so they better matched the historical period. The placement of the characters within the scene was also carefully considered so the image would clearly show the important moment from the story. Through this process of testing, revising, and refining, each illustration gradually developed into the version that appears in the book.



Interpreting the Past

Museums and historians often use the word **interpretation** when discussing history.

Interpretation helps people understand the past using three important ideas:

- **Evidence** – objects, documents, and artifacts from the past
- **Scholarship** – careful research and study
- **Context** – understanding the historical circumstances of the time



Interpretation allows historians to explore how people may have lived while recognizing that we cannot know every detail with certainty.

Modern Tools and Historical Imagination



Modern digital tools can assist artists when exploring historical scenes.

In this project, artificial intelligence was used as a tool to help explore visual possibilities based on historical evidence and research.

However, the final decisions about accuracy and composition were made through human judgment and historical review. This approach can be described as **historic reimagining**—a visual exploration of the past that is informed by documented evidence and scholarship and helps us think about how people may have lived, without claiming certainty.



Questions for Discussion

1. Why do artists create character studies before illustrating a story?
 2. Why might some illustration styles work better in printed books than others?
 3. How can studying real historical buildings help artists create accurate scenes?
 4. What does it mean to “interpret” history?
 5. Why is human judgment important when using modern technology to explore historical topics?
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Activity

Choose a moment from *The Prescott Girls* and create your own illustration.

Think about:

- what the characters might look like
- what clothing they might wear
- what objects might appear in the room or landscape
- what details would show the story takes place in the 1830s

Use a pencil to draw your scene and experiment with shading and lines, just as many nineteenth-century illustrators did.