

FELIX SEMINEGA– BOOK ILLUSTRATOR

The Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative (RCBI) works with local Rwandese publishers and illustrators to increase their capacity to produce attractive, age-appropriate reading material in Kinyarwanda, and catalyse an increased culture of reading in Rwanda. Part of the project involves Save the Children training publishers, writers and illustrators, and supporting them to develop new, quality titles for selling in the open market, whilst guaranteeing the purchase of a selected number. Felix tells us how Rwandan artists are in a much better position to express their culture and way of life in children’s books thanks to new opportunities in publishing and illustration.



Felix (pictured above) is an artist who was selected by Save the Children to participate in training and contribute artwork to children’s books and posters as part of RCBI. Felix tells us his story:

“I started drawing from a very young age when I was six years old, making pictures in the dirt on the ground. When we were children we used to amuse ourselves with drawing, telling stories, playing football...things like that. But me especially, I really liked to draw.

When I was fourteen years old, I went to an art school in order to improve my skills. I left this school as an illustrator and graphic designer. I was especially interested in illustrations and comic books. I was always interested in comic books and graphic novels and I followed that world, and the festivals for graphic novels.”

"After the genocide, I worked as an illustrator for the International Red Cross. I made drawings that showed and described their activities. In those days following the genocide, there were lots of refugees and things were very complex."

Most of all, I've worked with and for children, beginning with work for a publishing house that produced books for children in Africa. Children in Africa face many problems that are different from the problems that children face in other parts of the world, so these books addressed those problems. Then most recently I've been working with Save the Children.

I started with Save the Children through their training sessions. I went through a series of tests where I demonstrated my abilities and I was accepted into their training project. The trainer taught us many techniques, including techniques I was not familiar with before. I even learned techniques that I didn't know were possible before. There were things I had seen before but I didn't know how they were done. The training with Save the Children helped me understand how to do them myself."



One of Felix's drawings for an upcoming book

"The techniques we use in making books for children help them to understand stories and to understand that they too can draw or make collages themselves. A technique like cutting out shapes from a newspaper and gluing them down can be very simple. Techniques like this are easy for children to understand, and it gives them inspiration to do it for themselves and to be able to tell their own stories.

The Save the Children training taught us how to do decoupage and collage, and also a technique of painting in black onto a window and then pressing the paper against the window in order to get a reflected image, which is really extraordinary. I had seen this technique before in comic books but I had never done it for myself.

So far, I've made some posters for Save the Children that combines illustrations with poems. These posters illustrate different techniques that we've learned through the training. I am also working on the concept for a book with different things that interest children, like games, toys and animals. The book I am working on concentrates on toys that children play with. In making this book, I have done some research by visiting kindergartens and observing how children play – their gestures, their expressions. This really inspires me to make books for children... This helps me as an artist."

“I think drawing for children is my vocation; it is something that pleases me a lot. When I was a young child, I found that I wasn’t listened to. Even when I had ideas to express or things to say, I was the youngest in my family so no one listened to me.

So I believe that part of my work is to show that children need to be listened to and that they deserve better treatment. Working with Save the Children has really opened my eyes in this sense.

I believe that the work I’m doing will bring a lot to children in Rwanda. If children can have someone who listens to them, and who works hard to teach them things that they need to know...for me, this is something I really believe in. I think that my style of drawing really helps children.

The advantage of having children’s books about Rwanda made by Rwandans is that Rwandan artists know the culture better than other artists. We know the reality, the problems that children face in this country. When I was a child, we read books that were made by Westerners. Though that interested us very much at the time, even the books that were in Kinyarwanda were conceived and designed by people from other countries.”



Details from a poster Felix made using collage and decoupage techniques

“The books we’re making now for children in Rwanda are very different to the books I grew up with. I think we’re seeing that Rwandan artists are in a much better position to express our culture and our way of life in children’s books. This support for children’s literacy is really important as well. I see that the support Save the Children is giving to children’s reading is going to help the way children develop both in life and in their studies.”

Translated from French by Colin Crowley

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