



Erin S. Banks '00
Distinguished Alumni Award
October 6, 2017

Creativity flows through the veins of 2000 graduate Erin Bennett Banks, inspiring her to push her artistic boundaries and communicate visually in innovative ways.

At Houghton, Erin was known for her cheery disposition, her deep intellect and maturity, and her unrelenting pursuit of finding a solution to any problem. Art professor Ted Murphy remembers her perseverance on an abstract painting assignment, where Erin was forced out of her comfort zone to find a solution by experimenting with colors, brushes, and concepts. Her experience as a member of the inaugural First-Year Honors Program cohort exposed her to new sights, sounds, and artistic offerings in London, England, and she returned to Houghton with a broader perspective and more profound understanding of the world around her.

Erin draws on that breadth of experience for her design work, whether it's for museum signage and print pieces for exhibits, or creating branding and fundraising materials for nonprofits and faith-based organizations. Her artwork has been licensed and sold by retailers JCPenney and Bed, Bath and Beyond, and her illustrations have appeared in the *Harvard Business Review*, *Highlights for Children*, *The Weekly Reader*, and other publications.

Her books and stories often address the realities of difficult topics such as slavery, the Holocaust, and religious persecution. She delves deeply into these topics, finding elements of humanity and redemption that she draws out and depicts with respect and dignity.

Erin's five children's books have earned her recognition in *The New York Times*, Kirkus Review, Scholastic Books, School Library Journal, *The Washington Post*, and *Parents Magazine*. She has received awards from the National Parenting Publication, the Society of School Librarians International, and the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Bigotry and Human Rights.

Professor Murphy recognized Erin's talent while she was a student, and he has eagerly watched the evolution of her artistic journey. He views Erin as "a mature, thoughtful, creative, intelligent person who reflects the highest values of a Houghton education."

Erin, you bring unique insight to your artistic endeavors, drawing on your diverse experiences and knowledge to enrich all that you do. You portray challenging subjects with sensitivity and wisdom, and your list of recognitions and honors speaks to the profound impact of your brand of storytelling. For your creativity and work, we are proud to present you with a 2017 Distinguished Achievement Award.