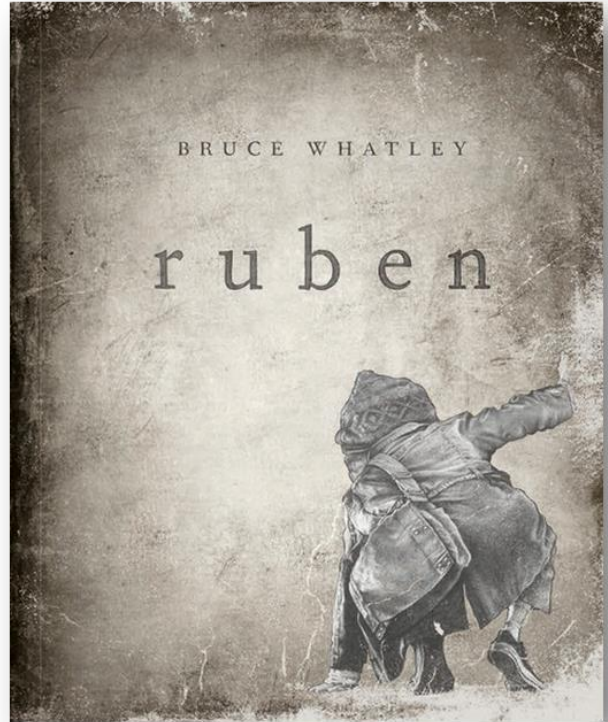


Ruben

Author/Illustrator

Bruce Whatley



Ruben's dreams were of places that made no sense to him. Places that didn't exist. At least not anymore.

Ruben lives in a safe place in a city that takes everything and gives nothing back. He begins to feel that he is in danger and ventures to Block City where he meets Koji. She too has been hiding from the dangers of the industrial city and its excesses. Ruben and Koji realise that if they combine their knowledge of how the city works they can find a way to escape . . . together. *Ruben* is a triumph of Bruce Whatley's imaginative and technical skills.

THEMES: dystopian, monochrome, industrial, friendship, loneliness

TEACHER NOTES

- In the epilogue, when we see Ruben and Koji on the train, we see a copy of *Gulliver's Travels* in Ruben's bag. Read *Gulliver's Travels* as a secondary text. As a class,

discuss why the author, Bruce Whatley, chose this book for Ruben to find and get inspired by.

- Ruben has a journal of scribbles and drawings from his dreams. Over the course of a week write a dream journal. As soon as you wake in the morning, write something down. See the similarities and differences of your dreams throughout the week, and if they relate to your feelings when you're awake.
- Using an apple core and a steam vent, Ruben makes a plastic bag float like a hot air balloon. Use this link to make a homemade hot air balloon <http://bit.ly/2ljplrs>.
- What do you think happened to all the adults, including Koji and Ruben's parents? Write a short story from either Koji or Ruben's parents' perspective and explain what happened to them.
- Pay close attention to Part Three. Notice how the controllers are burning books. Why would the controllers burn books? Read Fahrenheit 451 as a secondary text and discuss what taking away literature does to society.
- Look at the first three pages of part one, where Ruben has collected things he needed to survive. It includes things like drawings and license plates, which aren't necessarily required for physical survival, however they decorate his 'safe place'. In a post-apocalyptic world, what would you need to survive?
- Ruben is open to interpretation and is quite vague as a book. Look beyond the literal part of the book where Ruben is attempting to escape a dystopian land, and as a class brainstorm what this book is about. Read Bruce Whatley's introduction at the beginning of the book. He overcame writer's and illustrator's block to create this book. Does that impact your critical reading of the book, particularly Ruben's aversion to Block City?
- Look at the book through the lenses of writer's block. Every day Ruben dresses in the same outfit and takes the same route to Block City. What do you think this means in terms of Whatley's creative block?

- Ruben walks through the streets and knows that he has salvaged all he can and it is useless to him now. What does that mean in terms of creator's block?
- In an essay, discuss the depiction of dystopia and how that relates to an image of the future.
- Ruben has a collection of words, drawings and scribbles from his dreams. This is essentially a dream journal. Keep your own dream journal for a week. Use the journal as inspiration and write a short story.
- At the end of the book we see that Ruben uses a key to unlock the train carriage and get in. Read the book again and look for where he found the key.
- Discuss the symbolism behind Koji wearing the key around her neck, and how Ruben uses it to escape.
- In the epilogue at the end of the book, Koji is wrapped in a blanket and looks ill. Why is that? What do you think has happened to her?

WRITING STYLE

Ruben is written in third person, with Ruben as the eponymous main character and the story from his perspective. In *Ruben* the illustrations are just as important as the text, and can often go pages without a word. Bruce Whatley doesn't use any speech in the text, yet still manages to give the story from Ruben's perspective, with his fears and thoughts easily visible. The story is told through both illustrations and words and is set in a dystopian world. The characters find that once they find each other, they have the strength, reason and information to escape.

ILLUSTRATING STYLE

Bruce is a unique illustrator in that he uses digital and traditional art forms. He used a program called Cinema 4D to create a unique environment for *Ruben*. Cinema 4D is an animation software used primarily in film and gaming, but Bruce used it as a medium for his illustrations, and also as a reference point. Block City had to be unique, and though a lot of

materials were based on existing references, Bruce needed to create most of his own. So from his sketches Bruce constructed elements in the virtual 3D world, lit them as you would a stage or movie set, moved his virtual camera to where he wanted it, and then created jpegs. This was his base reference from which he drew.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Ruben needed to be different from anything else I had done before. It evolved during a time of self-doubt of my ability as an illustrator and storyteller. *Ruben* had to be more. It had to be the best I could be. *Ruben* is my biggest, most complicated project to date. A picture book I started to write ten years ago and started to illustrate six years ago.

– Bruce Whatley

AUTHOR / ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Bruce jumped into the unknown world of picture books after a career in advertising as an illustrator and art director working in London then Sydney. Since 1992 Bruce has written and/or illustrated over 80 children's picture books. Though based in Australia his work is published internationally.

His main inspiration has been his family, who feature in several of his earlier picture books, his wife Rosie Smith being co-author on many of his projects. He uses a variety of illustration mediums including gouache, pen and ink, pencil, oils, watercolour and more recently CGI software. His aim is to entertain and surprise the reader with illustration styles that vary considerably, depending on the text and the age group of his audience.

Bruce is continually looking for new, innovative ways to make images to tell his visual narratives.