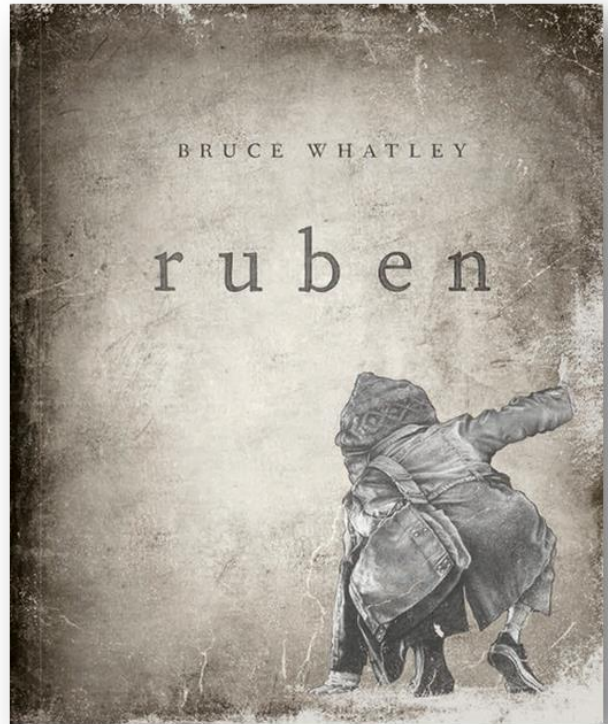


# Ruben

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

- 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 the details and ideas from the dream journal, write a short story.

- There is no speech in the book. Why do you think that is? What effect does that have?
- Why do you think all the illustrations are in black and white? What effect does that have?
- Look at the map Ruben drew of the city and look at Koji's map of the city. Can you spot the differences and similarities? Draw your own abstract map of where you live.
- 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>.
- In the epilogue, when we see Ruben and Koji on the train, we see a copy of *Gulliver's Travels* in Ruben's bag. Why do you think the author chose *Gulliver's Travels* as the book that Ruben found? Look at the story of *Gulliver's Travels* and see how that may impact Ruben and encourage him to escape Block City.
- Ruben has a routine. Every day he dresses in the same outfit and wanders into Block City. Do you have a routine? What does it consist of? Why do people have routines?
- After realising that the monolith's cargo are books, read Part Three again. What do you think the Controllers are doing with the books? Why?
- Choose between the three characters of Ruben, Koji and the Controller. Write a description of that character, including their personality. Imagine that you are describing that character to someone who has never seen or read the book.
- Imagine you are Ruben or Koji and you have just escaped Block City. Write a diary entry from your perspective about what you did and how you ran away.
- In pairs, choose a scene from the book and act it out. Just as they do in the book, don't say anything and mime out the scene.

- In the Epilogue, look at the page with the text ‘Ruben caught a train.’ The text does not reveal much, so we must look at the illustration. What does the illustration suggest happened? What are the clues that indicate that?
- Choose between the characters of Ruben and Koji. Write a description of that character including their looks and personality. Imagine that you are describing that character to someone who has never seen or read the book.
- As a class, choose a scene and try to describe what Ruben is feeling, such as the scene in which he remembers being almost crushed by the train bumpers. Brainstorm all his different emotions.
- 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.
- Ruben finds the key with Koji, and uses his knowledge, and her key to escape Block City. Discuss what a metaphor is, and how this works into a metaphor.

## 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.