

Teachers Notes
by Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Unforgotten
Tohby Riddle

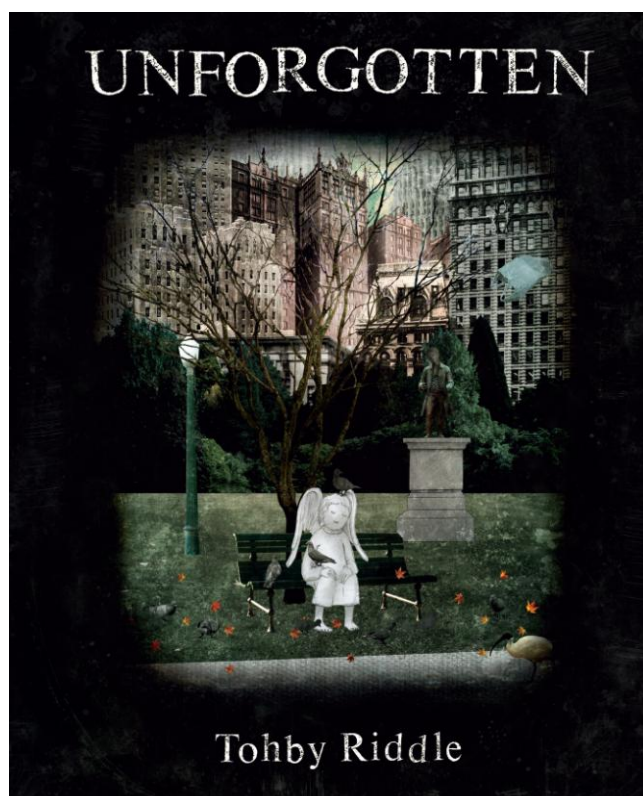
9781742379722

Recommended for ages 8-18 yrs

Older students and adults will also appreciate this book.

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction	2
Curriculum areas	3
Language & Literacy	3
Visual Literacy	3
Creative Arts	4
SOSE (Themes)	4
SOSE (Values)	6
Conclusion	6
Bibliography of related texts	7
Internet resources	8
About the writers	8
Blackline masters	9-12



INTRODUCTION

'Like a thought hard to hold'.

This extraordinary illustrated work is about not forgetting — about being aware of others, and ensuring that they are noticed and remembered, either in our own time, or in the eras which come after us. It contains a never-ending and cyclical story of falling and rising, destruction and re-building, loss and renewal. It's about opposites – dark and light, despair and hope, doubt and faith, compassion and alienation. It's about the ties that bind us to each other.

Tohby Riddle has created a visual feast that depicts the awesome chaos of the universe and a panorama of city life which is gritty and unforgiving, but also mesmerising and strangely beautiful.

Using photographic collage and his skilful drawing, he imagines a landscape of both immense beauty and potential destruction. Anachronistic collages suggest that the life we live is overlaid by many lives; that the shadows of those who come before us, and those who are yet to come, hover in the corner of every sequence and every scene. His richly suggestive images are as if taken with a camera which 'freezes' each instant and leaves the reader guessing about that moment in time.

Communication, or a lack of communication or engagement with others, lies at the heart of this work. The 'impossible birds' referred to are angels, one of which falls to earth and almost becomes a frozen park sculpture. It is rescued by a small band of two children, a clown, a pantomime donkey, a puppy and a pigeon, who warm it up and mend it. It then flies away. 'And where it goes nobody knows ...'

Unforgotten suggests that 'someone' is always watching over us ... or at least, that we each like to think so ...

CURRICULUM AREAS

This book could be studied in lower and upper primary and lower secondary classrooms. It is relevant in two **curriculum areas**: **Arts** (Language and Literacy, Visual Literacy, Creative Arts); and **Studies of Society & Environment** (Themes, and Values). Within **SOSE** it could also be used to explore **Themes** such as:

- **friendship and community,**
- **cycle of life,**
- **city life,**
- **historical continuity,**

and to explore **Values** such as:

- **Faith (Angels and Beliefs in a Higher Being/Spirituality),**
- **Compassion,**
- **Hope**

[See notes under **Curriculum Areas** below.]

CURRICULUM AREAS

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

- This book is based on an **evocative and very poetic text** written in a free verse style, which is suggestive of subtle and ambiguous meanings. Invite students to choose a line from this poem and describe what it means to them.
- **The book is arranged in three numbered 'parts'**. Invite students to consider the contents of each part, to describe in words the nature of each part, and the connections between them. As an exercise they might also give a 'title' to each part. This title might a) be drawn from the written text, or b) be imagined by the student in relation to the contents of that part.
- Encourage students to **write poetry using a free verse style** as in this poem. Choose one of the themes discussed below as a catalyst for this writing assignment.
- This story employs a **third person narrative voice** allowing for the ambiguous interpretation of the story to unfold in a range of ways, according to the reader. Break the class into groups and invite students to write a brief summary of what the text says to them as readers, by first reading the words without the pictures, and then by reading the pictures as well.
- Write an **acrostic poem** using the letters in 'Unforgotten' to explore this theme.
- Test your students' **comprehension** after reading the story by answering simple questions. [See **BM1**.]

VISUAL LITERACY

- This work might be described as **an illustrated book for older readers. It is akin to a graphic novel, except that the latter is often defined as a genre for its inclusion of comic style art.** It falls into the tradition established by artists such as Shaun Tan, Art Spiegelman, Nikki Greenberg, Matt Ottley, and Neil Gaiman with Dave McKean, in that it takes a minimalist text and makes of it a richly suggestive, visual feast and emotional journey. Many of the images are akin to paintings or collages employing photography and other mediums to make meaning. Although it doesn't employ comic art to tell the story, *Unforgotten* has endpapers and some pages which use a wordless filmic or comic style to convey meaning. The term 'graphic novel' is often used to describe a picture book which doesn't fit the usual narrative arc of a picture book. This one includes a range of strategies which are typical of such a genre. Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* is also such a book, as is Matt Ottley's *Requiem for a Beast* and Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean's *Signal to Noise* or *The Wolves in the Walls*. Conduct a unit on sophisticated picture books and graphic novels, and encourage students to seek out similar examples of such art. [See **Bibliography**.]
- **Each of the pages in this book would encourage what critic Jane Doonan describes as 'close looking'**. The artist has created a series of densely imagined and then carefully conceived and worked images which repay careful observation and interrogation.
- Discuss the **layout and design** of the book, and of the individual double page spreads within it.
- The **half-title page** depicts a cloud formation against a greenish blue sky. As we turn to the **title page**, we see a view of the city against a sombre coloured skyline. How do these two images work together to make meaning for the reader?
- Encourage students to **read for the 'sub-text'** and observe how the pictures and the text work together; how images illuminate meaning, complimenting and enriching the text. Examine several images in the book for their possible meanings. For example,

at the beginning of Part III there is a silhouette image of three statues in relief depicted in proximity to each other with spotlights or searchlights behind them.

- The artist's images are executed in **collage style including photographic backgrounds, statues, realistic and drawn figures**. Discuss these techniques and the artist's choice of mediums with your students and then encourage them to create a picture in this style. [See **BM 2**.]
- **What main colour palette is used in this book?** What role does it play in terms of the themes in this work?
- How does Tohby Riddle **convey emotions** in his images?
- There are also **references to various artists** in these images. Find images which reference famous artworks, sculptures or architectural treasures.
- Discuss the **format, and use of perspective and spatial relationship** in this visual text, in individual **double page spreads**.
- Discuss the use of **symbols or emblems** in these images (eg. the richly orange autumn leaves in the pictures of the angel on the park bench, or the clouds and billowing smoke which also appear in many images). Discuss their possible meaning.
- **The images in this novel are suggestive of those seen with peripheral vision** or from outside the traditional gaze of the viewer. Have you ever sensed something to your left or right which when you turn is not there? Examine the pictures in this book with that idea in mind.
- Examine the front and back **cover images**, and discuss how and why the illustrator has used light and colour in these images.
- Students could create their own interpretations of the **endpapers** which are a series of images of angels viewed from different perspectives.

CREATIVE ARTS

This book could also be used to explore a range of other creative arts such as acting, improvisation, music and dance.

- Improvise the scene in the book where the angel comes to lie on the portico of the temple where his friends have brought him to rest.
- Choose two pieces of music which are suggestive of the feelings of the group that rescues the angel.
- Make a graffiti wall in your classroom inviting students to create messages about life in the city, which are meaningful to them. You might use butchers' paper or a whiteboard as the basis for this 'wall'.

SOSE (THEMES)

Friendship & Community

- **'Unforgotten'** is a word which has two meanings in this context. It can refer to those who are forgotten, unnoticed or neglected by those around them, or those people who are 'forgotten' by the ages which follow. So this book is about the links between people, generations, and cultures, as much as it is about how we mend those who are in need of help, here and now.
- The book ends with the angel being rescued, and then ascending to begin an errand of mercy again. **This is the ultimate expression of not forgetting**; that in an act of remembering or 'unforgetting' we can contribute to future acts of mercy or empathy.

Cycle of Life

- The **deliberately anachronistic images** suggest that this is a timeless story which has relevance for all ages. The images include people in various period costumes; images of buildings such as the temple with Ionic columns (in Part III), and other details which are arrestingly out of place in contemporary life. There are some images which are shortly to become anachronistic as well (eg. phone box which is disappearing from our landscapes due to the ubiquitous mobile phone).
- The **angel is first depicted flying through the cosmos** in a huge sky akin to the chaos of the universe; then into a recognisable sky and a constellation of stars; then it is depicted flying ever closer to the Earth's atmosphere into a bank of clouds, before the cityscape becomes recognisable. This telescoping of the view is an effectively filmic way of introducing the book to its readers. Discuss.
- **The image after the beginning of Part II depicts a possible scene of destruction;** it may for example, depict a war zone, with a red cloud covering a city which may have been annihilated. Compare to Matt Ottley and Gary Crew's *The Serpent's Tail* or Gary Crew and Shaun Tan's *The Viewer* which have similar themes on the cycle of human and ecological destruction and renewal.
- The **final image in the book is of a street sign** depicting arrows as for a roundabout. This might be interpreted in a number of other ways too. It may suggest, for example, that the human race is on a collision course from which we need to turn back. Discuss this image.

City Life

- **This book contains many images of cityscapes.** It features things which are typical of cities such as overpasses, high-rise buildings, skyscrapers, parks, underground railways, subways, alleyways, shopfronts, department stores, monuments, street signs, bridges or aqueducts, steps, scaffolding, chimneys, street lamps, and shipping containers. **It also includes images of buildings and architectural details** such as spires, obelisks, and domes. **It depicts forms of transport** such as cars, bicycles, carts, boats, ships, horse and buggy (or sulky), and a helicopter. **It also depicts the people** who inhabit the inner city including commuters, office workers, salespeople, buskers, street workers, hawkers, and homeless people. **They are often dressed in a variety of costumes from different times and cultures** (eg. a soldier in a US Confederate uniform, a woman in a Victorian gown, a man in a Native American head-dress, academic gown, masks, kaftans etc). **Cars, too, are from different eras. Signage on shopfronts and buildings** is often written in a variety of different languages, and sometimes includes graffiti. **It includes animals** such as dogs, a donkey, and birds. **Even the sky is full of life!** There are not only angels, but light aircraft, jet planes, and blimps. **Choose any one of these categories, and find words to describe other things you see in the images.**
- **Many of the figures in this book are stone figures or sculptures dressed in clothing.** What does this suggest about these figures or characters?
- **Trash or rubbish is another ugly aspect of a large city. Graffiti** plays a part in conveying this idea with many walls scribbled with messages and with alleyways obviously harbouring the lost and needy in this huge metropolis. [See **Creative Arts** above.]
- **Lonely, homeless or lost people are another thematic thread in this urban narrative.** Discuss the idea of homelessness and alienation. Are cities necessarily lonely or alienating places? Is it harder to find someone to help you in the city?
- **What else does this book suggest about city life?**
- **Conduct a unit on cities, and how people live in them.**

Historical Continuity

- **Memories** are one of the things which bind generations together. In this book, the images suggest that the past is always with us. Discuss this concept with your students.
- **Stories** are another way of keeping in touch with the past and leaving something for the future. What stories do you know which connect us to our past? Discuss legends, fables and myths as a way in to this topic. Then discuss urban myths, rumours, gossip and other forms of contemporary story-telling.
- **Human beings also leave 'tangible' signs of their passing:** in cemeteries, in monuments, in buildings, and in the cities and cityscapes they create. What other tangible things does one generation leave to another?
- **The ties that bind family members are another link between past, present and future.** Invite students to write a brief family history and a chart showing how they are linked to people in the past.

SOSE (VALUES)

Faith

- What do your students believe in? Discuss with them the concept of faith. What causes people to lose faith in human nature?
- Angels are symbolic figures; spirits or messengers protecting those on earth and in heaven. Discuss what the concept of an 'angel' means to your students.

Compassion

- Encourage students to think about how they would feel if they discovered someone lost or alone in their neighbourhood. Would they stop to help them?
- This book is a claim for us not to forget or ignore others and their needs. There are many organisations which promote this idea, including a website for a UN organisation, aptly titled the 'Unforgotten Fund' which aims to assist those in need. <<http://www.unforgotten.org/>> Encourage students to discuss the need to assist those in their community; to empathise with those who might need their assistance.

Hope

- Discuss the word 'hope' with your students.
- Ask them what gives them hope? What do they hope for?

CONCLUSION

This is an enigmatic visual and written text which allows the reader room for multiple interpretations. Such 'gaps in the narrative' are typical of Tohy Riddle's works, which are each unique in their seamless blend of complex ideas with luminously artistic execution in words and images. This latest work is bound to be a classic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED TEXTS

PICTURE BOOKS

- Baker, Jeannie *Home in the Sky* Walker Books, 2003.
- Gaiman, Neil and Mckean, Dave *Signal to Noise* Bloomsbury, 2007.
- Gaiman, Neil and Mckean, Dave *The Comical Tragedy or Tragical Comedy of Mr Punch* Bloomsbury, 2006.
- Gaiman, Neil and Mckean, Dave *Wolves in the Walls* Bloomsbury, 2003.
- Greder, Armin, *The City* Allen & Unwin, 2010.
- Greenberg, Nikki, *The Great Gatsby* Allen & Unwin, 2007.
- Megarrity, David and Oxlade, Jonathan *The Empty City* Hachette, 2007.
- Oliver, Narelle, *Home* Scholastic, 2006.
- Ottley, Matt *Requiem for a Beast* Hachette, 2007.
- Spiegelman, Art, *The Complete Maus* Pantheon, 1986, 1973.
- Talbot, Bryan, *Alice in Sunderland: an Entertainment Cape*, 2007.
- Tan, Shaun, *The Arrival* Hachette Livre, 2006.
- Tan, Shaun, *The Lost Thing* Lothian, 2000.

ABOUT PICTURE BOOKS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

- Anstey, Michèle, and Geoff Bull *Reading the Visual Written and Illustrated Children's Literature*. Sydney: Harcourt, 2000.
- Doonan, Jane, *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* Thimble Press, 1993.
- Gleeson, Libby *Making Picture Books* Scholastic, 2003.
- Greenberg, Nikki 'Creating a Graphic Novel' *Magpies*, Vol 22, Issue 4, September 2007, pp 4-7.
- Gregg, Michael, 'Graphic Novels' *Magpies* Vol 12, No 5, November 1997, pp 20-1.
- Mahoney, Blair, 'Graphic Novels in the Classroom' *Viewpoint*, Vol 14, Issue 1, Autumn 2006, pp 2-4.
- Sheahan-Bright, Robyn 'Interview with Jane Doonan' *Magpies* Vol 15, No.4, September 2000, pp. 18-21.
- 'Tan, Shaun, 'Picture Books: Who Are they For?' <<http://www.shauntan.net>> [Accessed June 2012]
- Wagner, Erica 'Listening to the Language of Pictures' *Magpies* Vol 19, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 8-10.

ABOUT TOHBY RIDDLE

- Roy, James 'Know the Author Tohby Riddle' *Magpies* Vol. 25, No. 4, September 2009, p 8.
- Steinberger, Kevin 'Ambitious with Meaning While Maintaining Simplicity: Kevin Steinberger Looks at the Work of Tohby Riddle and How to Read his Works Visually' *The Literature Base*, Vol 12, No 2, 2001, pp 4-9.

Interview with Tohby Riddle [Transcript] NSW Department of Education and Training, 2009:
http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/Web/writerstalk09/lo/riddle/riddle_02.htm

INTERNET RESOURCES

'Graphic Novels' Allen & Unwin's website provides links to some valuable references on this topic: <http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=598>

'Graphic Novels' Research Project of PHD Candidate Clare Snowball
<http://alia.org.au/~csnow/research/index.html>

ABOUT THE WRITERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Tohby Riddle is an award-winning writer, illustrator, cartoonist, designer and sometime editor based in Sydney, Australia. He has written and illustrated numerous well-loved picture books; written a novel (published as a young adult book); was the cartoonist for *Good Weekend* (the Saturday magazine of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*) for nearly ten years; and is a former editor of the *The School Magazine*, a literary magazine for children published by the NSW Department of Education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THESE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, has published widely on children's and YA literature, and in 2011 was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, and in 2012 the CBCA (National) Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia.

BLACKLINE MASTER 1 COMPREHENSION QUIZ



QUESTIONS:

1. What is drifting through the air above, and to the left of the angel on the park bench on the cover?
2. Where else does this object appear in another picture?
3. When the angel rides the subway train, how many people are sitting opposite the angel, and what are their distinguishing features?
4. Find the words 'Do not be afraid' in this book.
5. Three blimps appear in which image?
6. What type of ancient building is depicted twice in this image?
7. The angel is picked up off the park bench by two workers and taken away. Where do they take it to?
8. This picture also includes several suitcases. What is the pattern on the one at the front of the picture?
9. What does the clown do when the angel is resting in the temple?
10. What safety signs appear in this book?



Answers: 1. A plastic bag. 2. In the street scene featuring the Chinese lettering above a shopfront and in the snow scene where the angel has almost frozen and a man and girl are observing her. 3. Three men: one in a nightcap holding a paper bag; one in a Native American head-dress; and one in a suit holding a book. 4. They appear on a wall on the left-hand page opposite the page featuring the text 'and to warm'. 5. In Part II, on the page depicting a street scene with clouds of smoke billowing behind the people. 6. Two temples on top of rocky mountains. 7. Answers such as 'the Parks Depot', 'a warehouse' would be appropriate. 8. It is striped. 9. He plays a violin. 10. No entry; Hazchem (Hazardous Chemicals); Roundabout.

BLACKLINE MASTER 2 ANGEL

Create a collage of this angel set against a cityscape. Draw your own background scene, and then make the angel stand out by using a material which is luminous (eg. fluoro paint) or tactile (eg. feathers). Add something suggestive of the themes to this image (such as the autumn leaves in some of the pictures in this book). [You might like to enlarge this page before beginning.]



BLACKLINE MASTER 3 STORY STARTER



- a) Write a caption for this image.
- b) Invite students to write a story about this image.

BLACKLINE MASTER 4 TEST YOUR STUDENTS' VISUAL UNDERSTANDING.

Invite them to find these items in the images and to draw the image beside the word:

Dome		Obelisk	
Spire		Blimp	
Temple		Sulky	
Column		Boater	
Witch's hat		Phone box	