

# The Rabbits

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Mun & Tucker



# Agenda

Reading *The Rabbits*

Info about the text

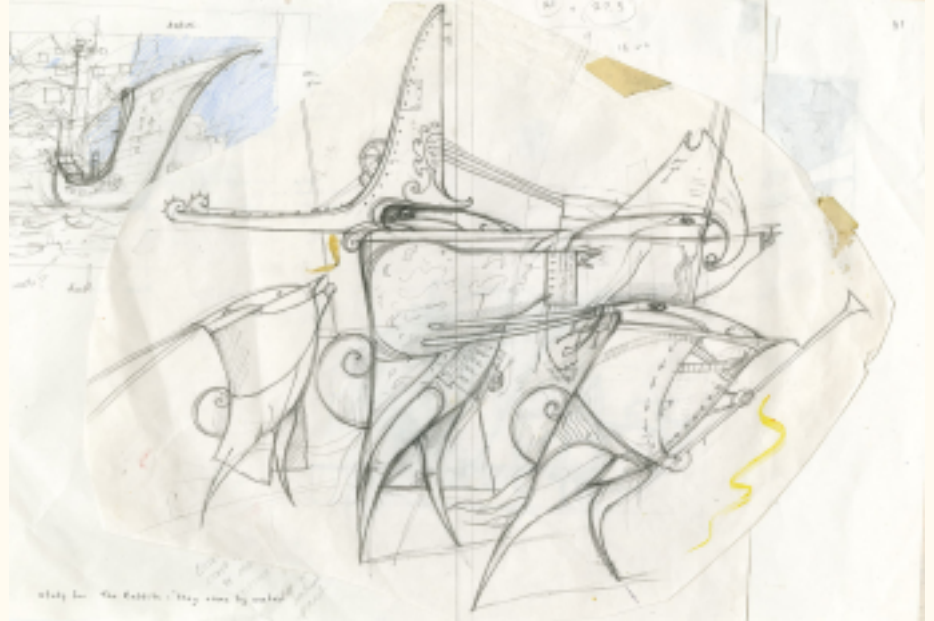
Plot

Themes

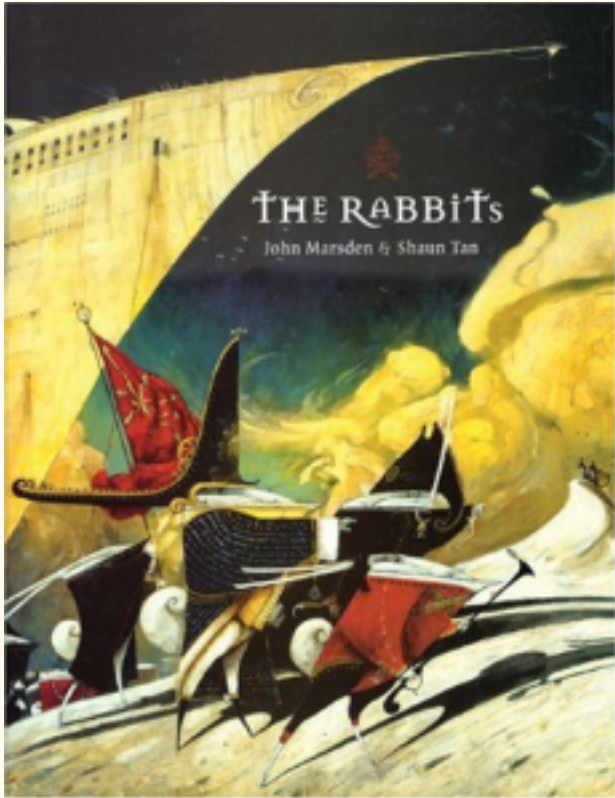
Merits

Challenges

Important Considerations When  
Teaching this Text



# *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan



## **Plotline:**

*The Rabbits*, a picture book written by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan, is partly allegorical fable about colonisation, told from the viewpoint of the “colonised”.

An unseen narrator describes the coming of ‘rabbits’ in the most minimal detail, an encounter that is at first friendly and curious, but later darkens as it becomes apparent that the visitors are actually invaders.

# *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan

**Genre:** Picture Book

**Target Age Group:** 12-17 (mature themes and concepts)

## **Dominant Themes:**

The generational effects of colonization on Aboriginal communities

Environmental education and humanity's relationship to land

Power vs. powerlessness

The perils of technology and industry

# Merits of the Book:

**Simple** and **accessible** vocabulary (great for ELL students).

**Short** and **succinct**.

Detailed and **expressive artwork** is very appealing to the eye.

Focuses on **complex** and **mature themes**.

Makes students reconsider **who picture books can be made for**, and **what they can be about**.

Awarded **Picture Book of the Year** by the Children's Book Council.

# Challenges of the Book:

Complicated, mature, and delicate themes necessitate **substantial contextualization** and **scaffolding**.

**Potentially problematic ending** in depicting the colonized as helpless or needing to be saved, **needs to be discussed and challenged**.

In-depth visual analysis may require **frontloading of visual literacy vocabulary** and analysis skills.

This text begets **questions of authorial authenticity** based on the subject matter (Shaun Tan is of Malaysian-Chinese and Anglo-Irish heritage).

# Important Considerations When Teaching this Text

Make sure to inform students that simply **equating** one example of colonization, or one aboriginal **experience**, with any other, is **reductive** and **tokenistic**.

Explain the implications of teaching a text with an allegory for aboriginal colonization authored from non-aboriginal individuals. **What are the implications of letting non-aboriginal individuals tell the story of aboriginals?**



# Shaun Tan's Interpretation



“The Rabbits is a story of universes colliding; one culture driven by powerful technology that transcends nature (much like our own), and another whose spirit is embedded in an ancient ecology.

“The Rabbits is about a deep environmental crisis, a crisis of conscience, and a costly failure of communication. At the end the question of reconciliation is left open to the reader as it is in the real world: The future, as always, remains undecided” (Tan 1998).



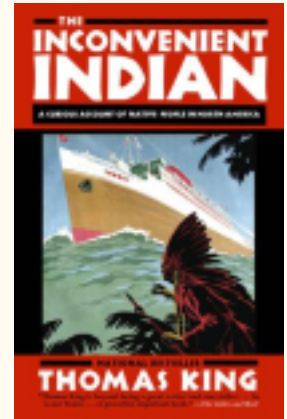
# Teaching Possibilities

Explore **truth and reconciliation** resources and the effects of colonization on generations of Aboriginals. Pair with Nicola Campbell's *Shi-Shi-Etko* and *Shin-Chi's Canoe* to further explore the topic of **residential schools**, or with Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian* in senior grades to explore **colonization** as a whole.

Students can engage in a **close reading of the visuals** of the book, and analyze images and symbols in relationship to the text.

Students could conduct a **study of other "mature" picture books** (e.g. *The Island* by Armin Greder, *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan) and compare them to the form and content of traditional picture books aimed at younger audiences.

**Discuss the ending** of the text and why it could be considered to be problematic in its depiction of aboriginal peoples as helpless.



# Teaching Possibilities (Continued)

Students can compare *The Rabbits* to the **historical paintings and imagery** that inspired Shaun Tan's visuals (e.g. "The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay" by E. Phillips Fox).

Students can take on the roles of either Rabbits or Marsupials and **act out a series of tableaux** that retell or interpret the events of the text from different points of view.

Students can work to **create soundscapes** of the Marsupial's home, before and after the Rabbits arrive.

The class can watch and **analyze the opera adaptation** of the text, considering the many additions and changes made in translation.



# Close Reading Activity

In your groups review one spread from *The Rabbits* to analyze and **discuss the visuals in relation to the allegory of Aboriginal colonization from the Europeans.**

List some of your observations on the chart paper.

You will have 2-3 minutes at each station.



# Exemplar:



# What to Look for in your Visual Analysis:

Line

Balance

Shape

Contrast

Colour

Emphasis

Value

Movement

Form

Pattern

Texture

Rhythm

Space

Unity

But our old people warned us. Be careful.  
They won't understand the right ways.  
They only know their own country.



More rabbits came . . .

THEY DIDN'T LIVE IN THE TREES LIKE WE DID.



THEY MADE THEIR OWN HOUSES.

WE COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THE WAY THEY TALKED.

THEY BROUGHT NEW FOOD, AND THEY BROUGHT OTHER ANIMALS.



WE LIKED SOME OF THE FOOD AND WE LIKED SOME OF THE ANIMALS.

BUT SOME OF THE FOOD



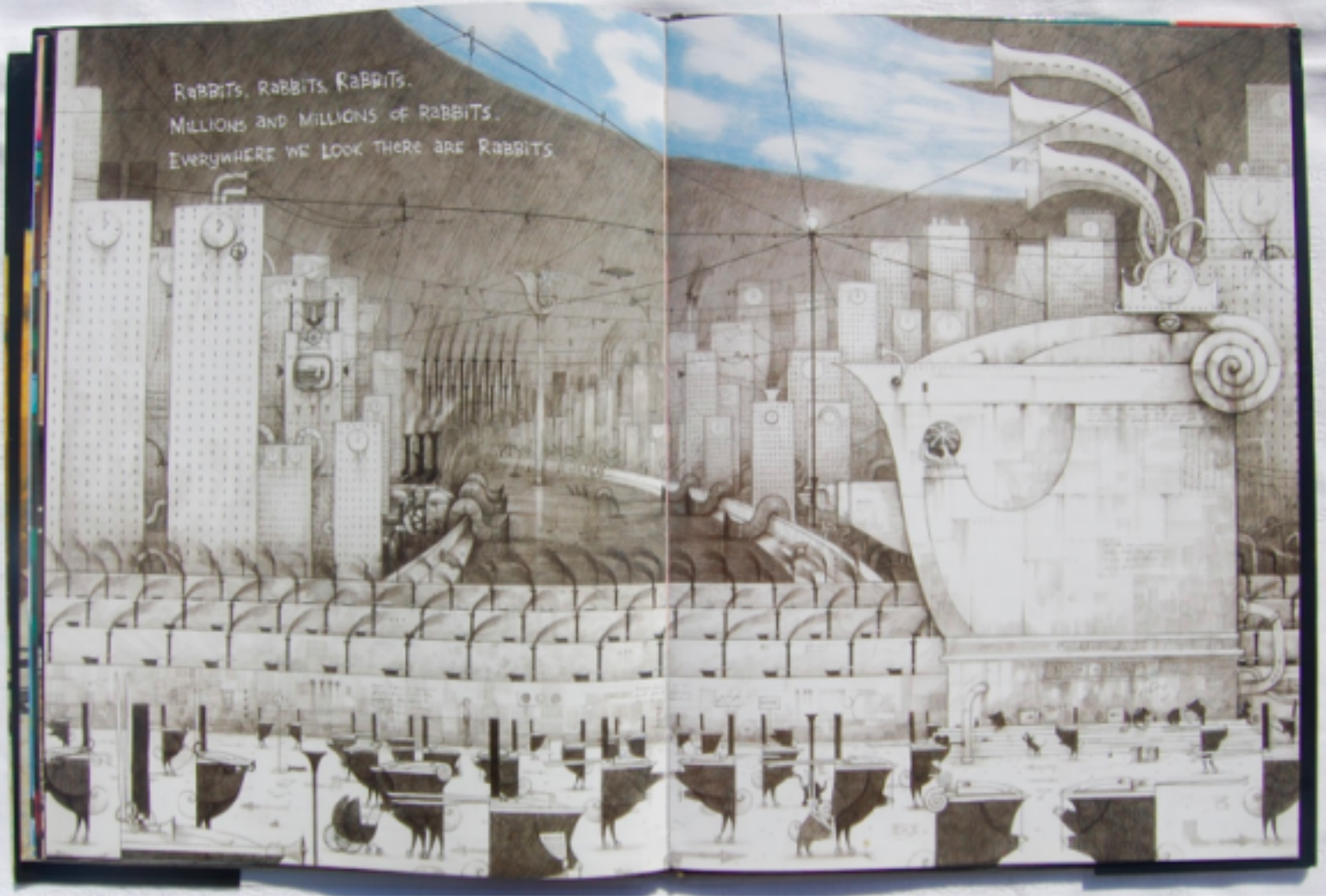
MADE US SCREW

AND SOME OF THE ANIMALS SCARED US





RABBITS, RABBITS, RABBITS.  
MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF RABBITS.  
EVERYWHERE WE LOOK THERE ARE RABBITS





**Questions?**



# Resources

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Shi-shi-etko. Nicola I. Campbell, 2005. Groundwood Books: House of Anansi Press.

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Tan, S. (2002). *The red tree*. Vancouver: Simply Read Books.