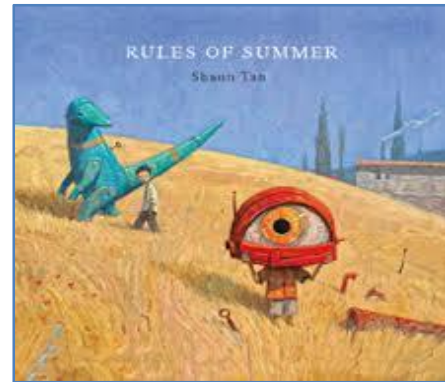


Title: **Rules of Summer**  
Author/illustrator: **Shaun Tan**  
Publisher: **Hodder Children's Books**



### First look

- Slowly share this book, page by page, with the minimum amount of comment. Try to ensure that each shadower is given a chance to read it to themselves before working with the book.
- Look closely at a few selected pictures and ask the group to point out to each other anything that strikes them as interesting about the artwork.
- Chat in pairs or as a group about whether they enjoyed *Rules of Summer*. What did they like or dislike and why?

### Look again

The work of Shaun Tan is internationally admired. His pictures are not always 'easy on the eye' but thinking and talking about them will help make his vibrant images more accessible. Don't worry if his style doesn't appeal to you. You don't have to like his work to recognise the power of the images. When the group have discussed first responses, return to the book; look, think and talk more about the artwork. Talk about any visual aspect of the book that interests you, i.e. end papers, font choices, title page and layout. How do these 'extras' to the story contribute to the overall impact of the book?

It is well worth visiting: [www.rulesofsummer.com.au](http://www.rulesofsummer.com.au) to read the interesting pages of information about Shaun Tan and how this book was created.

### Rules of Summer is a picturebook

Unlike an illustrated book, a picturebook cannot be fully understood without reading the visual text. In the case of this book, the meanings are made more from the images than from the written text. Readers often find Tan's work disconcerting so it is important to discuss the readers' first responses and give time to consider both the positive and negative comments prompted by the book. As this text is so complex, you may not have time to study each page in detail but it is worth talking in depth as a group about a few pages.

For example, start by looking at the book's cover and asking questions.

- The cover is an oil painting. Oil paint can be manipulated by an artist to create various effects. Does this style remind you of an artist famous for painting swirling patterns of corn?
- The scene is set in a cornfield which is bathed in summer sunshine. The sky is blue. The smoke from the chimney shows there is a slight breeze. Look at the back cover.
- Describe the expression on the older boy's face and the impression given by the way he is moving. What might he be thinking? The younger boy's head (i.e. brain, mind, thoughts) is covered by a massive machine-like eye. The bits of metal 'body' that go with the eye are scattered around in the corn. Is the boy trying to work out how to put the bits together?
- Are the monsters imaginary? Look at the older boy's mechanical monster; it has a key in its back. Perhaps it works by clockwork so must be wound up by the key. Who would turn the key? Is that another key on the ground near the other boy?

You will find links with the front cover once you start reading each page. Put all the ideas together to find common themes in the story.

### **Interpreting the text**

It is always beneficial, when studying a book, to use tasks which require imaginative response to encourage students to engage fully with the text. The following suggestions may help the group of young readers to become engrossed in the book.

#### **What is the book about?**

When common themes have been discovered, it will be possible to speculate about what the focus of the book. We can describe what happens in each picture but meanings are not obvious. Ask the group of shadowers to consider some of the following possible interpretations. The book is about:

1. Playing with a friend, falling out and making up
2. Being smaller, younger and less experienced
3. Power; who or what is powerful?
4. Bullying, being afraid
5. Real or imagined fears
6. Being bored

Add any other suggestions.

#### **Reality or imagination?**

The first part of the book is riddled with terrifying situations. Make a list (it can be a drawing or a written list) of all the creatures and situations that threaten the boys.

The young boy always finds himself in the wrong and, when frustration leads to anger and fighting, he finds himself imprisoned. Look through the bleak and desolate pages towards the end of the book when the young boy is trapped. All the creatures that represent 'fear' (the hawks, rabbit, robots etc.) observe the fight then disappear. More and more crows appear? What part have the crows played in all the activities?

It is only during the last few pages that the joys of summer – light, colour, warmth, music and plentiful, ripe fruit – are available. And even then, the final image that we see is stark – the ever-present black crow crouches on a crown, a symbol of power, and winter closes in.

#### **Oppositional themes**

Work with a friend to find examples of these ideas throughout the book. For example, take the words:

- **Sunshine/cloud** As the book is about the summer, sunshine could be expected but how often is it sunny in the pictures?
- **City (urban)/countryside (rural)** Is the story set in the bright cornfield depicted on the front cover or in an uninspiring urban environment?
- **Light/dark**
- **War/peace**
- **Human/mechanical**