

Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing*:
From Book to Film
Education Resource



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia



CONTENTS

SHAUN TAN'S THE LOST THING: FROM BOOK TO FILM..... 4

ACMI Education Resource	4
About Shaun Tan	4
Shaun Tan's The Lost Thing.....	4
Before Visiting the Exhibition.....	5
Introducing the Book	6
Introducing the film	10
Engaging with Shaun Tan's The Lost Thing: From Book to Film.....	16
The Boy	17
The Lost Thing.....	19
Asking Around.....	20
Production Process.....	22
Storytelling	23
The City	25
Federal Department of Odds & Ends	27
Utopia	29





SHAUN TAN'S THE LOST THING: FROM BOOK TO FILM

ACMI Education Resource

This resource has been developed to complement Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing*. From book to film, an exhibition curated by the Australian Centre for the Moving Image to explore the artistry of Shaun Tan's original picture book and the collaborative process of turning the book into an animated film. The exhibition includes concept drawings, storyboards, creature design and interviews with Shaun Tan and the creative team who worked with him on the film.

The resource is designed to give teachers of upper primary and secondary students an insight into the art of Shaun Tan through a focus on both the book and the film of *The Lost Thing* in the context of the exhibition. The focus is on storytelling: themes, techniques, forms and language, visual, written and aural. Questions and activities can be adapted, simplified or extended to suit the year level being taught.

Included at the end of this resource are: 'Things to Notice in the Exhibition' exhibition trail (5 question and 10 question version), a primary activity sheet and an entry form for the Shaun Tan colouring competition.

ABOUT SHAUN TAN

Shaun Tan is a Melbourne-based freelance artist, author and illustrator whose award winning books re-imagine the world in unexpected ways. Tan creates stories that encourage readers to ask questions rather than reach conclusions. His books include *The Lost Thing*, *The Red Tree*, *The Arrival* and *Tales from Outer Suburbia*. *The Lost Thing* has been made into an award-winning animation that draws on Tan's unique creative vision. As well as writing the screenplay for *The Lost Thing* and working as co-director, Tan was intimately involved in all aspects of the animation production process.

SHAUN TAN'S THE LOST THING

The Lost Thing tells the story of a boy who discovers a bizarre lost creature at the beach and sets out to find somewhere it can belong.

When creating *The Lost Thing*, Tan drew on multiple sources of inspiration, including some old scientific and engineering textbooks that belonged to his father.

I began to imagine a world where this was the only illustrated literature available, where everything was fully explained, clear and functional, including all verbal and visual language, all meaning predefined. What if something playful and absurd suddenly appeared in this world? How would people react? This became the real subject of the story, not so much the problem of a lost creature as outlined by the text.¹



When adapted to film, the story of *The Lost Thing* continues to explore a world where people have lost the ability to really see what is around them or to recognise and value something special and extraordinary.

The film draws on the melancholy sense of loss accompanying the boy's memories of the Lost Thing. He was the only one in his bleak and soulless world to notice the strange lost creature, and the only one who cared enough to find a place for it to belong. However, after glimpsing the magical world of lost things, the boy is left on the other side of a closed door looking towards a future where he will become like everybody else: someone who 'stops noticing'.

EXPLORING THE LOST THING

Before Visiting the Exhibition

This is an accessible exhibition that engages and informs visitors regardless of their previous knowledge of Shaun Tan's work. However, students will benefit from being introduced to the book and the animation



prior to the visit. When exploring a moving image text, it is always preferable for students to enjoy an uninterrupted first viewing before focusing on its construction as a text.



Courtesy Lothian Books/Hachette

INTRODUCING THE BOOK

Shaun Tan emphasises that he writes picture books not children's books. His books, like many picture books, deal with complex themes.

*There is an appealing simplicity in the form, which is not to say that it is necessarily simple: the restrained coupling of text and image can contain any level of poetic sophistication or complexity. 'Art,' as Einstein reminds us, 'is the expression of the most profound thoughts in the simplest way.'*²

Accordingly, Tan's illustrations do not 'explain' text but build a landscape of questions and 'silent ideas'.

*When working I often like to think of words and images as opposite points on a battery, creating a potential voltage through a 'gap' between telling and showing. It requires the reader's imagination to complete the circuit, their thoughts and feelings being the current that fills the silent space, without prescription.*³

Respond

Before reading the story:

1. Focus on the cover as a class and share ideas in response to these (and other) prompts.
 - What stands out?
 - What is it telling us about the story we are going to read?
 - What might be meant by 'A tale for those who have more important things to pay attention to'?

After reading the story:

1. Think about your response to the story and share your ideas as a class, in small groups or with a partner.
 - How did the story make you feel? Explain.
 - The boy is the only person who notices the Lost Thing. What does this tell you about the world where the story takes place?
 - What happens to the Lost Thing?
 - What happens to the boy? Why?
 - Now that you have read the story, how would you explain the meaning of the line on the cover: 'A tale for those who have more important things to pay attention to'?
2. Respond to the look and visual style of the book.
 - Describe the different visual elements used to represent the boy's world and the world of lost things. Why do you think these two places are depicted in the way they are?
 - What colours have been used to represent the two worlds explored in the story? Why?
 - Make a list of the shapes and objects that comprise the worlds portrayed in *The Lost Thing*.
 - Focus on the different angles and perspectives used to represent the boy's world. Describe three of these perspectives in detail and explain what they add to the story.



- The book is made up of pictures of many different sizes; some pictures fill the page, while others are much smaller. Compare the effect of this way of constructing the book with another picture book that is more uniform. Why has Tan chosen this way of telling his story?
- What is the effect of the engineering text books that provide the background for the story? Why do you think this background is not used for the world of lost things?
- What is the purpose of the bottle top drawings on the inside of the cover? What do they add to the story?
- What do you think of the final image? Why does the story end like this? What does this image add to the story? Explain.

Reflect

1. *The Lost Thing* is a story that encourages readers to ask questions and to return to the story to find out more about the world it presents.
 - What did this story make you think about?
 - Why doesn't anyone other than the boy notice the Lost Thing? What does this tell us about him and the people around him?
 - Describe the setting of the book. What kind of world does the boy live in?
 - Look more closely at the Federal Department of Odds and Ends.
 - What does it look like?
 - Describe the way it is depicted. Focus on colours, shapes, perspectives and angles.
 - How do the words of the story add to the description?
 - How does the Lost Thing respond to this place? Why?
2. Focus on the ending.
 - How has the boy changed in the time since he last saw the Lost Thing?
 - Why do you think he sees weird things 'less and less these days'?
3. This is a book about ideas.
 - Make a list of all the ideas explored.
 - Share these ideas as a class.
4. Shaun Tan stresses that picture books are not always books for young children.
 - Prepare a short presentation in any form you wish to explain why *The Lost Thing* is not a children's book.
5. The world of the story is a place where no one notices very much at all and this has made it lifeless and bleak.
 - Why does 'not noticing' have this negative effect on people's lives and the world around them? Can you think of some real-life examples of the danger of not noticing?
6. As well as exploring many different aspects of human experience, *The Lost Thing* draws on many different emotions.
 - What are some of the feelings that the story evokes?
7. As well as being heartfelt and whimsical, *The Lost Thing* is also comical.



- How and where is humour used in *The Lost Thing*?

Explore

1. Choose a page or a double page spread from the book and consider how the pictures and the words work together to tell the story.
 - When answering, take into account the overall design of the page including the borders and the arrangement of words and pictures on the page.
 - As well as describing the page you have chosen, explain how it fits into the story as a whole.
2. In creating the images for his book *The Lost Thing*, Shaun Tan drew inspiration from artists as diverse as Edward Hopper, John Brack and Hieronymous Bosch. Hopper and Brack contributed to **the look of the boy's world** and Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* inspired the look of the utopian world of lost things.
 - Find out more about the work of these artists and give specific examples of where and how Tan draws on them in his own work. In your answer, focus on colour, shape, contrast and depth.
 - If you are particularly interested in the influence of other artists on Tan's work, you may like to read his essay on the subject of 'Originality and Creativity' <http://www.shauntan.net/essay2.html>
3. Picture books are not always books for young children.
 - Go to Shaun Tan's website to read what he has written about the picture book form and the way he sees his role as writer and illustrator. Tan, Shaun, 'Words and Pictures, an Intimate Distance', *Lingua Franca*, Radio National ABC, 2010, <http://www.shauntan.net/images/essayLinguaFranca.pdf>
 - In this essay Tan uses the metaphor of the battery to describe the relationship between words and pictures in his stories and the role of the reader.

When working I often like to think of words and images as opposite points on a battery, creating a potential voltage through a 'gap' between telling and showing. It requires the reader's imagination to complete the circuit, their thoughts and feelings being the current that fills the silent space, without prescription.

Explain what he means and give examples from your own reading of *The Lost Thing* or another of Tan's books.
 - Give some examples of moments in the story where you have used your imagination to 'complete the circuit' that Tan describes.

Create

1. When the boy and the Lost Thing visit The Federal Department of Odds and Ends, they meet a sad, lost, forgotten creature with a small voice. This creature reappears in the final page of the story.



Courtesy Lothian Books/Hachette

- Tell this creature's story.
 - What is it?
 - Where has it come from?
 - Why has it ended up where it has?
 - Why do you think it directs the Lost Thing to the place for lost things but does not go there itself?
 - You may choose to tell this story entirely in words or entirely in pictures, or you may choose to combine words and pictures.
 - As a class, share your stories and explore the similarities and differences in your responses.
2. Taking as a guide the many different angles and perspectives from which the Lost Thing character can be observed, create your own creature within a world and draw it from a number of different and unexpected perspectives.
- Combine the class's responses to create a gallery of 'lost things'.



Courtesy Lothian Books/Hachette

INTRODUCING THE FILM

When visiting the exhibition, students will receive a rare insight into the creative process of producing an animated film. This will inform and enrich their subsequent responses to the film. The film is screening in the gallery but, as space is available for only a handful of visitors, it is unlikely that students visiting as a group will be able to watch the entire film.

If students have seen the film prior to coming to the exhibition, it will enhance their understanding of the adaptation process being explored.

As well as exploring the film text using the 'Respond, reflect, explore and create' prompts, you may also like to draw from ACMI Education's Guide to Film Analysis in the Classroom.

Respond

1. Share your impressions of the two main characters in the film.
 - Jot down three words to describe the Lost Thing. Share them with the class and create a list.
 - What about the boy who tells the story? What three words best describe him as a character? Share these as a class.



- Compare responses to these characters. What do the differences and similarities in individual responses reveal about these characters?
 - In groups, discuss other characters who appear in the film and provide a brief description of their role in the story.
2. Describe the two worlds presented in the film.
- Divide a page into two columns. In the first column, list all the words that you can think of to describe the everyday world and, in the second column, words that describe the Lost Thing's world.
 - Describe your first impressions of the boy's world?
 - Which aspects of the boy's world made the strongest impression on you? Explain why.
 - Divide into groups and share your responses. Did particular scenes or images stand out for everyone, or was there a variety of responses? Explain.
 - What aspects of the world of lost things make it stand out from the boy's world?
 - Which creature most captured your imagination? Why?
 - In the book, the world of lost things is glimpsed through a door, but in the film we enter this other world and get to see what it is like. (Notice how important the sky and open space are in this scene.) How does this affect the story as a whole?
 - Although this word is not used in the film or the book, Shaun Tan refers to the world of lost things as 'Utopia'. Find out what this word means and then write a short paragraph explaining why and how this world could be described as a utopia.
3. Focus on the opening of the animation.
- Why have the credits been designed in the way they have?
 - How do they prepare the viewer for the story to follow?
 - Describe the music and the sound effects used and explain their effect. What do they add?
 - What is your initial impression of the boy? Explain -- focus on his movements, voice and the words he uses.
4. How does the ending of the animation make you feel?
- Compare the ending of the film with the ending of the book.
 - How are they similar? Explain with examples.
 - Are there any major differences? Explain with examples.
 - Why do you think the filmmakers have kept some elements but changed others?
5. In the book, the reader remains quite separate from the Lost Thing and the boy, whom we generally see in the distance. In the film, we are drawn into the world and connected more closely with the boy and his experience.
- Watch the film as a class and note down some of the ways we are connected to the boy as a character and experience events from the boy's perspective.
 - How does the voiceover connect with what we see to draw us into the story and into the boy's point of view?



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia

6. For Shaun Tan a work of art is required to make us ask questions about what we already know.⁴
 - Make a list of questions that arise from viewing *The Lost Thing*.
 - Do you think all of these questions have an answer? Explain.
 - The questions that arise in the film relate to the themes explored in the narrative (story).
7. Read the following definition of theme and then divide into groups and share ideas about the themes explored in *The Lost Thing*.
 Theme: refers to ideas or issues that are beneath the surface of the story. Themes relate to concerns, beliefs, or feelings about life in general. For instance, in *The Lost Thing*, although they are not stated, a couple of themes might be loneliness and friendship.⁵
 - Join together as a class and discuss the themes you have shared in your groups.
 - Focus on one of these themes and explain how it is explored in the film. As well as mentioning story elements, focus on the exploration of this theme through sound and the visual language of the film.

Reflect

1. In the audio commentary that accompanies the DVD of *The Lost Thing*, Shaun Tan describes the city where the boy lives as having 'a dead heart'.
 - What does this mean? How can a place have a dead heart?
 - Expand on your answer by focusing on a specific scene: perhaps the end of the day at the beach, the evening at home or the visit to the Federal Department of Odds and Ends.
 - With this description of the 'everyday' world in mind, how would you describe the world of lost things?
2. In *The Lost Thing*, Shaun Tan uses symbolism to create a link between what we see on screen and our everyday lives. A writer or a filmmaker is using symbolic language when s/he uses an image that



stands for a larger and more complex idea or set of ideas. In *The Lost Thing* the two worlds are symbolic – but so too are smaller elements of each world.

- What do you think is being communicated in the Federal Department of Odds and Ends through the use of colour, form, sound and light?
 - What is suggested by the spreading expanse of blue sky in the world of lost things?
 - When you explore the meaning of a work like *The Lost Thing*, you should not expect or even want to come up with a definitive meaning. *The Lost Thing* is about many things and can be understood in many ways. With this in mind, write a paragraph about what you think the Lost Thing represents. Use evidence from the film to support your response.
3. Shaun Tan worked as part of a creative team to turn his book into an animation. As a consequence, the book and the film share a similar look and feel. However, these two texts are also very different as they are completely different art forms.
- As a class, make a list of the things the creators of *The Lost Thing* animation needed to consider when adapting the picture book for the screen.
 - Open the book at a random point in the story and then compare it to the comparable scene or sequence in the animation. Use this example to explore the decisions the animation team made about sound, timing, words and phrasing, creating 3D sets, the narrator's voice and, perhaps most importantly, the interpretation of character (including shape, colour, movement, expressions, gestures, sound effects). You might like to break up into groups to do this exercise.
 - You might like to visit ACMI Generator where Shaun Tan and the rest of the team discuss some of the challenges they faced and how they solved them. <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing>
4. Shaun Tan describes the soundscape of *The Lost Thing* animation as offering another dimension to the artwork, as if he was given another colour palette to use.
- Focus on the sounds of the world of the story. How do these sounds affect your response to, and understanding of, the world?
 - What are some of the sounds that you found particularly effective or memorable?
 - Choose a 30 second segment and list all of the elements of the soundscape. (You will need to listen to it more than one once.)
 - Listen to the sounds that accompany the Lost Thing's movements.
 - How do the sound effects add to what you see?
 - Does the Lost Thing sound the way you thought it might?
5. In the midst of all of the complex technical decisions the team needed to make as part of the 3D animation process, they struggled to find the right person for the narrative voice-over:
*...it was trying to find the right balance between somebody whose voice was engaging and some kind of interesting quality and at the same time to be a little bit flat.*⁶
- Why do you think the narrator's voice needed to balance these two qualities?
 - Why was it so important that the team should choose the right voice to tell the story?
 - Follow the words of the book as you listen to *The Lost Thing*. Take note of the words that have been changed and consider why.
 - Have they been changed to contribute to the narrative flow?
 - Do they connect better with the timing of the animation?



6. In this online interview, Shaun Tan describes some of the difficulties involved in adapting his story for the screen <http://motionographer.com/2011/01/19/the-lost-thing-interview-with-shaun-tan/>
- Can you explain what he means when he says that one of the challenges for the creative team was: 'How to tell a story about apathy without inspiring apathy.'
 - What does he suggest is the solution to this potential pitfall?
 - Give specific examples from the film of the filmmakers' response to this challenge.



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia

Explore

Mise-en-scène is an expression related to the design aspects of a film (or theatre) production. It refers to everything that appears in the frame. Key aspects of mise-en-scène include, but are not limited to, composition, sets, props, actors (or, in the case of animation, characters) and lighting.

1. Mise en scène is used to tell you more about the story that is being told. For a clearer explanation and analysis of mise-en-scène, freeze-frame on a selected frame of a scene from *The Lost Thing* and discuss the mise-en-scène and its relationship to the narrative. Consider the following in your discussion and analysis:
 - Setting/location: where are we?
 - Framing: what is in the frame, what has been left out?
 - Placement of objects within frame and why this is so.
 - Where are the characters placed within the frame and why?
2. Mise-en-scène is important in creating mood or an atmosphere.
 - What is the mood of the scene you are focusing on? Explain.
 - Describe how this mood has been communicated in the mise-en-scène.
 - Describe the colours used. What do you think is the significance of the selected colours? How do the colours add to the story?
 - Explain how lighting is used to create meaning. Is the lighting bright, gloomy, dreary or dim? Is lighting used to create contrast? How is shadow used? (Shaun Tan has described the lighting of the animation as the 'varnish'.)

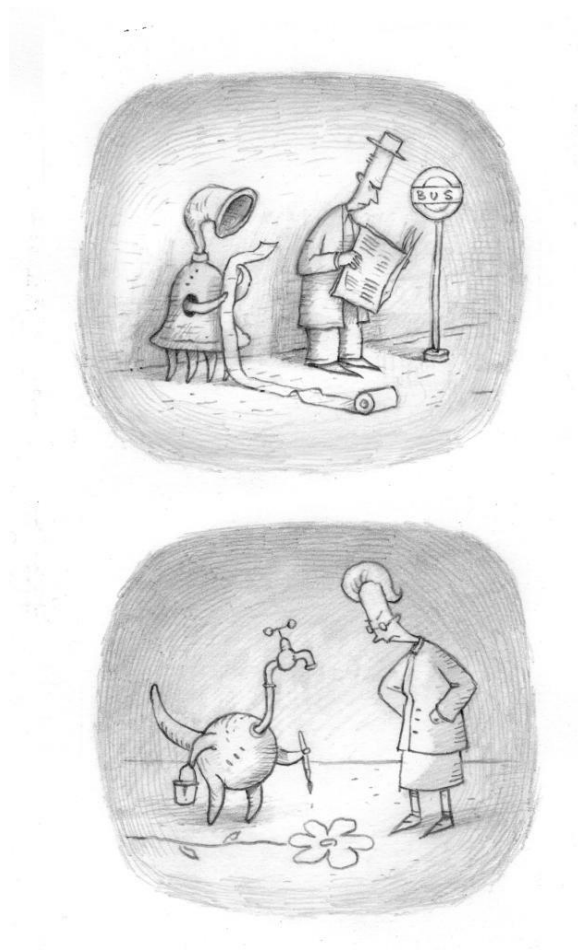


- Explore the design of the set (production design). Draw or list three elements of the production design that add to the mood or atmosphere conveyed in this scene. Explain.

Create

Shaun Tan played a crucial role in all aspects of the animation production process and, in fact, created his own 2D animation for the Federal Department of Odds and Ends TV advertisement.

1. Watch this advertisement and plan your own simple 2D animation. (You may like to refer to the section on animation in the *Screen It* resource: <http://www.acmi.net.au/global/docs/screen-it-teacher-resource-2013.pdf> but there are also many excellent 'how to' videos on Youtube.

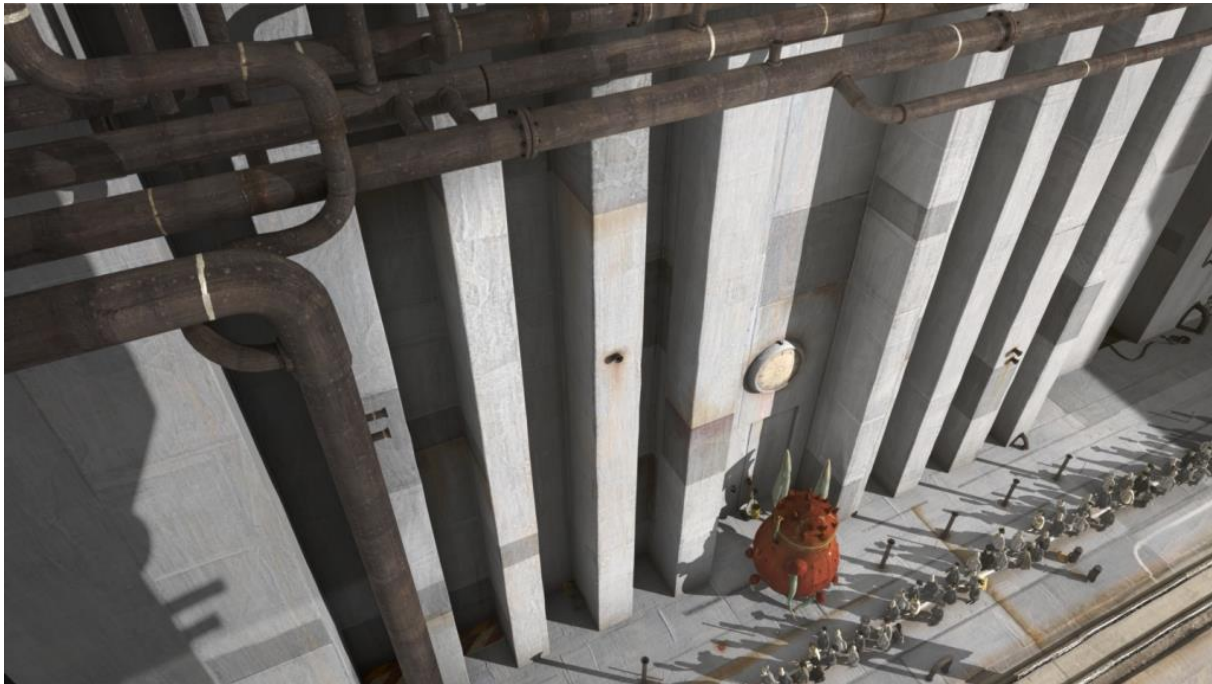


© Passion Pictures Australia

2. When Shaun Tan is writing and illustrating his books, he works in a portrait format but, when adapting *The Lost Thing* to the screen, he needed to work in the wider 16 by 9 landscape format.
 - Either draw, photograph or find an image in a portrait format and then 'adapt' it to landscape in such a way that it looks as though it is meant to be in that format. What did you need to add or subtract to achieve a satisfying result?
3. Choose a picture book (either by Shaun Tan or a different author) and imagine you are turning it into a short film.
 - Create the storyboard for a short scene or sequence from the film.



- What are some of the things you have to take into account when creating a moving image work? (For instance, think about sound, different shot types, movement and characterisation.)



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia

THE EXHIBITION

Engaging with Shaun Tan's The Lost Thing: From Book to Film

Turning the book into a film was a natural progression for Shaun Tan, as he had conceived of the images in the book as 'stills from an imaginary film'. The project of adaptation 'presented an opportunity to expand upon key scenes, not only by adding motion and sound, but also visual content, adding further subtle layers of meaning and feeling'.⁷ From a 32 page picture book, this strange and evocative story has been translated into a 15 minute film comprising of 74 individual characters, 22 computer generated sets and a complex and subtle sound design.



You can get a glimpse of the range and focus of the exhibition in this trailer from ACMI:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmgGL1ihmz8>

THE BOY

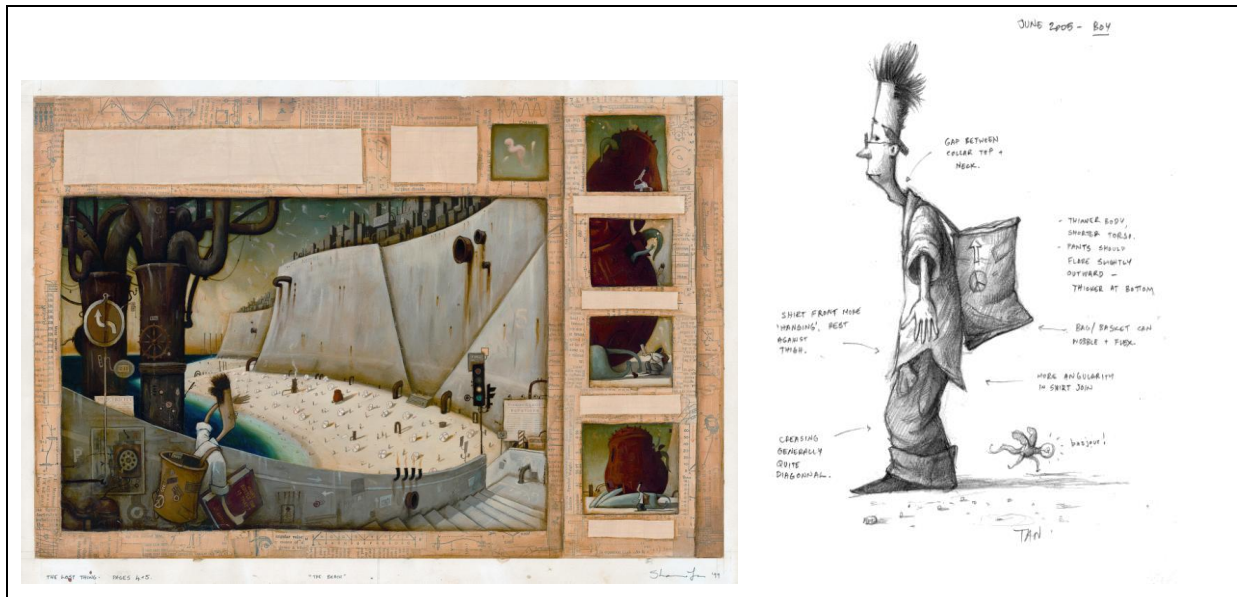
In the picture book, the boy character is generally viewed at a distance. However, the animation form requires a more intimate connection to character, with a range of different shots that bring the viewer closer to the character. In responding to this different storytelling form, Tan had to provide more visual information about this character. For instance, he designed a range of facial expressions, gestures and stances for the digital effects and animation team to use when creating the character.



© Passion Pictures Australia

Respond

1. Look at the following images. One has been taken directly from the book and the other is a character drawing made as part of the pre-production process.



© Passion Pictures Australia

- Describe the differences in the portrayal of the boy.
- How do these differences affect your understanding of the character of the Boy?
- How do these differences change your response to the character?

Reflect

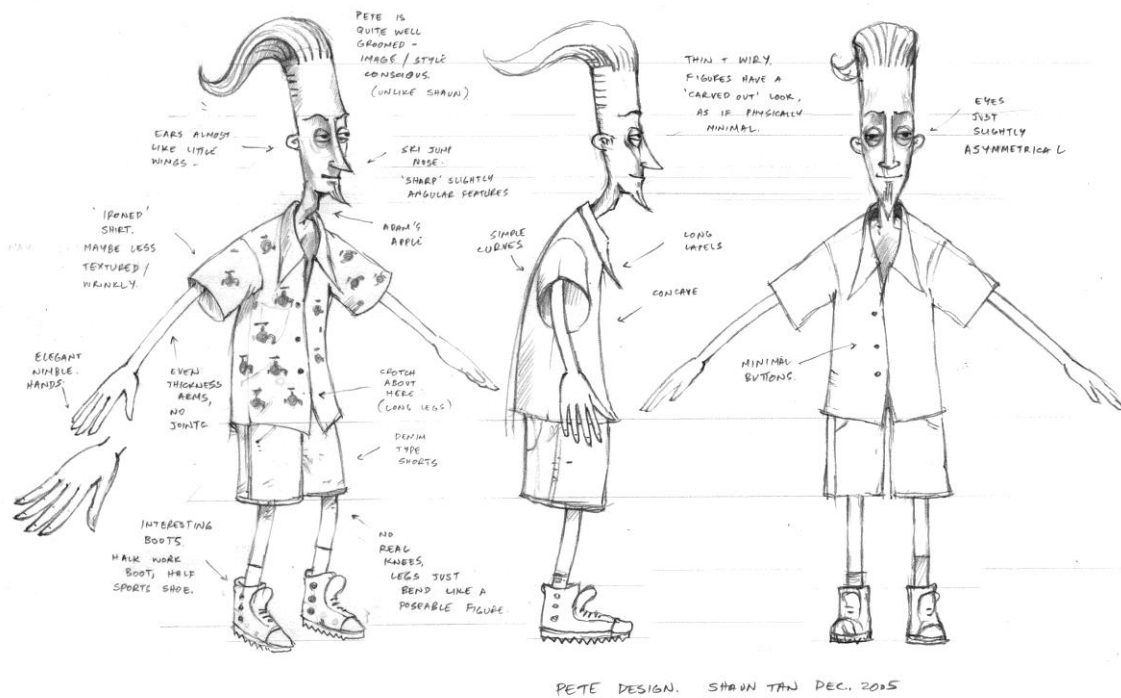
1. In describing the process of creating characters for the screen, Shaun Tan suggests that the relationship created between the viewers and the characters in the story has an intimacy that is not part of the experience of reading the book.
 - What do you think he means? Explain using examples from the book and the film.

Explore

1. While Shaun Tan worked with the animator and the CG artist to create more developed characters for *The Lost Thing*, he was also aware of the dangers of trying to make the characters look too real. If an animation or an image looks too similar to the real thing it can be quite unsettling. This effect is described as entering the 'uncanny valley'.
 - You can hear Tan talking about this effect here: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing/shaun-tan-character-and-uncanny-valley>
 - Find out more about the concept of the uncanny valley. From your research, can you explain why audiences often respond negatively to animated characters that look too real?

Create

1. Choose an image of a minor character from a picture book.
 - Imagine that this character is going to be animated.
 - Using the sketches of the boy's friend, Pete, as a guide, draw a character sketch to give the CG supervisor more information about the character.



© Passion Pictures Australia

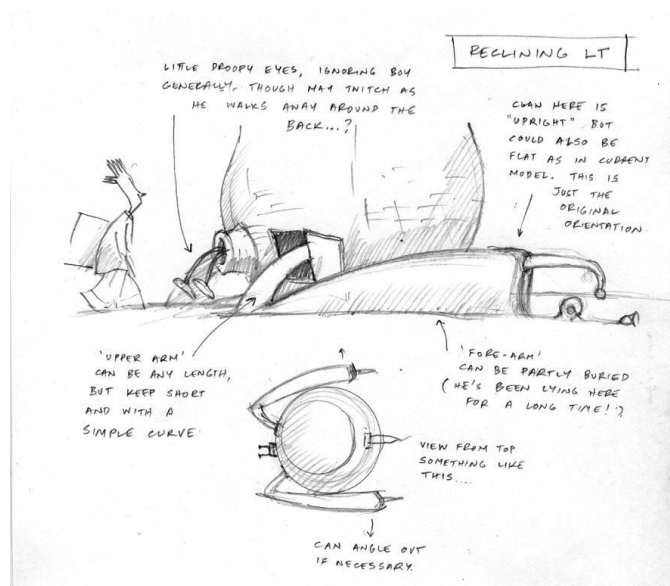
THE LOST THING

The Lost Thing is a very odd-looking character that doesn't have the conventional appeal associated with the cute, large-eyed creatures that are a feature of many animated stories. When the time came to animate this large creature with a metal carapace, large claws and no real eyes, the animators chose to use movement to emphasise its gentle personality.

To find out more about the decisions made, listen to Shaun Tan's description of the process of animating the Lost Thing: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing/shaun-tan-animating-lost-thing>

Respond

1. What was your response to the Lost Thing character in the animation?
 - Did you find the character appealing?
 - What is it about the character that you found appealing? Explain providing specific examples.
 - What did the animators do to achieve this effect?



© Passion Pictures Australia

Reflect

1. Many stories are told about outsiders who don't fit in.
 - What are some of the ways the Lost Thing is represented as an outsider in the book and then in the animation?
2. Even though the Lost Thing has a body like an army tank, we perceive it as something that needs to be looked after.
 - How have the animators managed to suggest that this large rusty creature is defenceless and in need of protection?
 - How important is the Lost Thing's walking movements in communicating its vulnerability?

Explore

1. Initially when designing the sound of the Lost Thing, sound designer John Kassab, tried to match sounds to the creature's movements and discovered that he had created a 'metal calamity'.
 - The approach Kassab decided upon was based on the idea that 'less is more'. After watching this interview, describe what he means by focusing on a specific scene in the film. Describe the sounds that accompany the Lost Thing's movements.
 - How do sound and music affect our response to the Lost Thing?

Create

1. Foley sound effects are recorded sounds that work with the visuals to tell the story.
 - Film, or if you have the time and patience, animate a short scene. Record a series of sound effects on a mobile device. Drop film and sound assets into a film editing program such as Movie Maker or iMovie and use your sounds to help tell the story.

ASKING AROUND

When creating *The Lost Thing* book, Shaun Tan was inspired by his father's old scientific and engineering text books. He created a background out of these books to suggest a world without imagination. Tan likes to think that *The Lost Thing* was the first piece of fiction ever produced in a society that focused only on facts with no interest in personal stories.



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia

Respond

1. The collage of text book pages that dominates the book is featured in the opening credits and in the sequence that opens with the line: 'I asked a few people if they knew anything about it.'
 - What happens in the 'collage' sequence?
 - Why has this sequence been animated in this way?
 - How does the collage frame add to what is being communicated?
 - In what other ways is the idea of a world without imagination represented in the animation?

Reflect

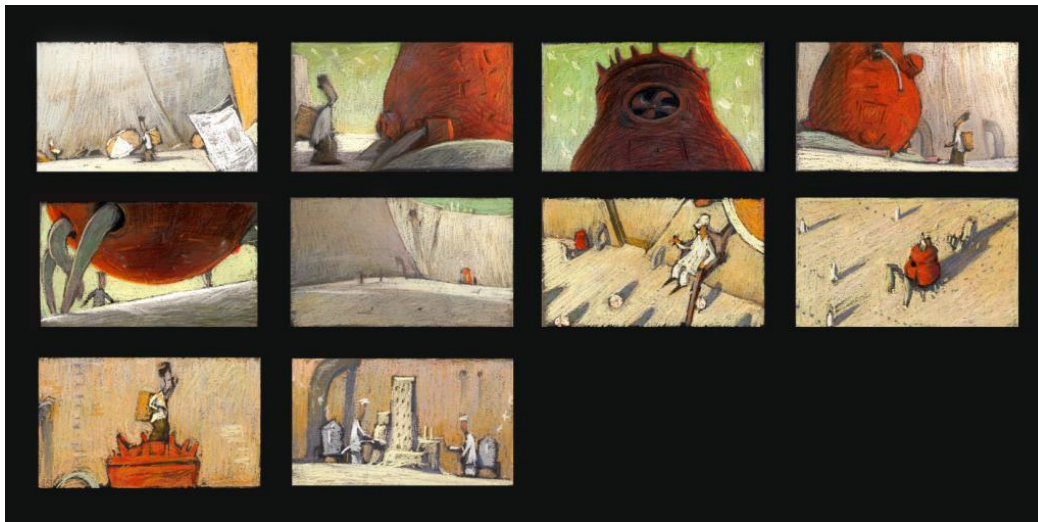
1. When adapting *The Lost Thing* for the screen, the creative team (including Shaun Tan) could not rely too heavily on the pre-existing work. This is how Shaun Tan described the process to ACMI curator Fiona Trigg:

In producing any adaptation, you have to start from scratch. You're not just taking one image and thinking 'Okay, let's try and turn this into a scene, what do we have to build? What do we have to move?' That was very rare actually if you look from book to film that there are scenes that are directly translated.

 - In this clip, Tan elaborates on the different ways the two forms (picture book and film) are read and the impact this has on the way the story is told. <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing/shaun-tan-adapting-book-film>
 - What are some of the things that need to be taken into account when adapting a picture book into a film?



- Choose a scene from the film to explain some of the challenges and changes that are required in the adaptation process.



© Passion Pictures Australia

Explore

1. Shaun Tan describes the book as 'concept art' that can be referred to in the filmmaking process.
 - What is concept art?
 - What is its purpose?

Create

1. The Lost Thing is a playful, purposeless creature who finds itself in a fact-driven universe where there is no art, music or literature.
 - Use your imagination to create your own version of a world without imagination using the creative form that best suits your ideas.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

As well as being the writer and creator of the animation of *The Lost Thing*, Shaun Tan worked as co-director with Andrew Ruhemann and was involved in all aspects of the production process.

Respond

1. Despite being a very 'painterly' book, *The Lost Thing* film was made using 3 D animation techniques.
 - What do you think this digital animation process has added to the film? Focus on the creation of the film's world and the animation of the characters.

Reflect

1. Before making any specific creative decisions, the producer, Sophie Byrne and the directors, Shaun Tan and Andrew Ruhemann, needed to make a number of decisions about how to tell the story.

As well as deciding how long the film would be, the creative team needed to decide the audience the film would be aimed at.



- What kinds of things need to be taken into account when deciding on the intended audience of a film?
 - Why is it important to know who the audience for a film is going to be?
2. Any form of storytelling requires the creator, or the creative team, to adopt a particular tone. Mood is about the feeling and atmosphere created within the story but tone relates to the audience and provides information about how to 'read' or understand the story.
- What is the 'tone' of *The Lost Thing*?
 - Is the tone of the film different from the tone of the book?

Explore

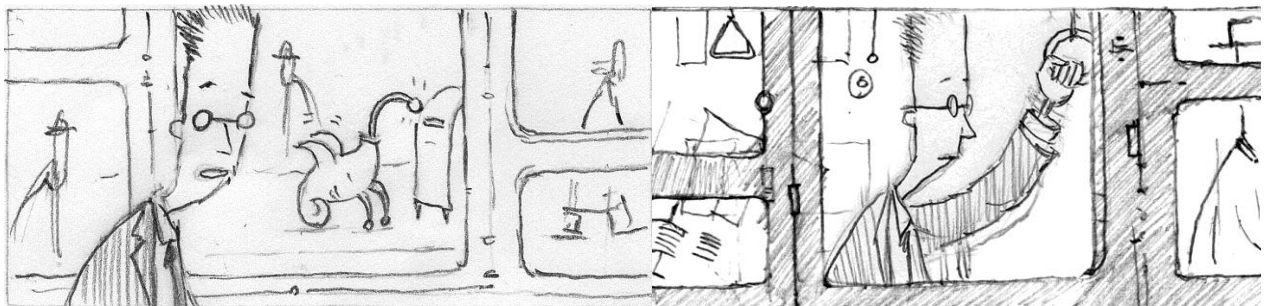
1. As part of the CG animation process, Tan worked with the CG supervisor to create a painted effect. This required Tan to paint textures and then scan them. They were then wrapped around the models. Focus on a single frame from *The Lost Thing* and describe the use of paint to add texture.
- Watch this clip to find out how this was done: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing/shaun-tan-texture-and-digital-animation>
 - Explain what this adds to the world of the film.
 - How does this technique contribute to the story being told?



© Passion Pictures Australia

Create

1. The storyboarding process is the same whether you are producing a live action film or an animation.
- Visit Storyboard Generator <http://generator.acmi.net.au/storyboard> and build your own storyboard, exploring the effect of different shot types.
 - You can use one of the scripts supplied or work from a short script you have written yourself.



© Passion Pictures Australia

STORYTELLING



Shaun Tan, like many artists, draws all the time, exploring ideas that may come to nothing or, alternatively, form the basis for a story. The story of *The Lost Thing* emerged from one of these small sketches, a drawing of a tiny man talking to a huge crab on a beach.

Respond

1. As well as exploring the process of adaptation from print to screen, the exhibition focuses on Shaun Tan's creative process as a picture book artist.
 - Visit ACMI Generator to hear him describe an element of this process:
<http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing/shaun-tan-creating-story-about-gradually-accruing-idea> Tan also talks about the way he works (his creative process) in the FAQ section of his website. <http://www.shauntan.net/faq1.html>
 - What aspects of Shaun Tan's very personal, and quite individual, process stand out for you?

Reflect

Shaun Tan comments that when he first begins a project, he starts off with very small sketches: 'The reason they are so small, and often done with just a pencil on copy paper or even a biro is that the moment that I start thinking I'm creating a significant work of art it becomes terrible.'⁸



© Passion Pictures Australia

1. Starting a project, particularly a creative project can be hard and people have different ways of working creatively and different techniques for getting started.
 - How do you begin a new project?
 - If you are wanting to be creative, what techniques do you use?
 - Do you use the same strategies each time, or do the strategies you use depend on the nature of the project you are working on?

Explore

1. Focus on an artist, writer, filmmaker or musician whose work you admire.



- Try to find out more about the way s/he develops ideas for a new project.

Create

1. It is amazing to think that *The Lost Thing* was inspired by a single tiny drawing of a boy sitting on the beach talking to a large crab.
 - Find an image that sparks your imagination and create an artwork or piece of writing inspired by this single image.

THE CITY

The City in *The Lost Thing* is a place without imagination or creativity. It exists to work efficiently but not to make its inhabitants' lives better.

Respond

1. Describe your impressions of the city of *The Lost Thing*.
 - What is the effect of the pipes, signs and lack of vegetation? Explain by focusing on a couple of specific examples.
 - Jot down some adjectives to share with the class that describe the music and your response to the music. How does the music add to the story being told? What aspects of the narrative does the music accentuate or complement?

Reflect

1. The place where *The Lost Thing* is set is a place without imagination.
 - How important are imagination and creativity to a society and to the people living in a particular place?
 2. Think about the place where you live.
 - Describe some ways that people express, experience or share imagination and creativity in your community.
 - Are there qualities or aspects that it shares with the world of *The Lost Thing*?
 3. As a class, you might like to put together a collection of images that demonstrate the differences and similarities between your world and the world of *The Lost Thing*.
 4. At the end of *The Lost Thing*, the boy has grown up and no longer sees 'lost things': 'Maybe there aren't many lost things around anymore nor maybe I just stopped noticing'. (In the book the line reads 'Maybe there aren't many lost things around anymore nor maybe I just stopped noticing them.')
- What happens to a place when people stop noticing things?

Explore

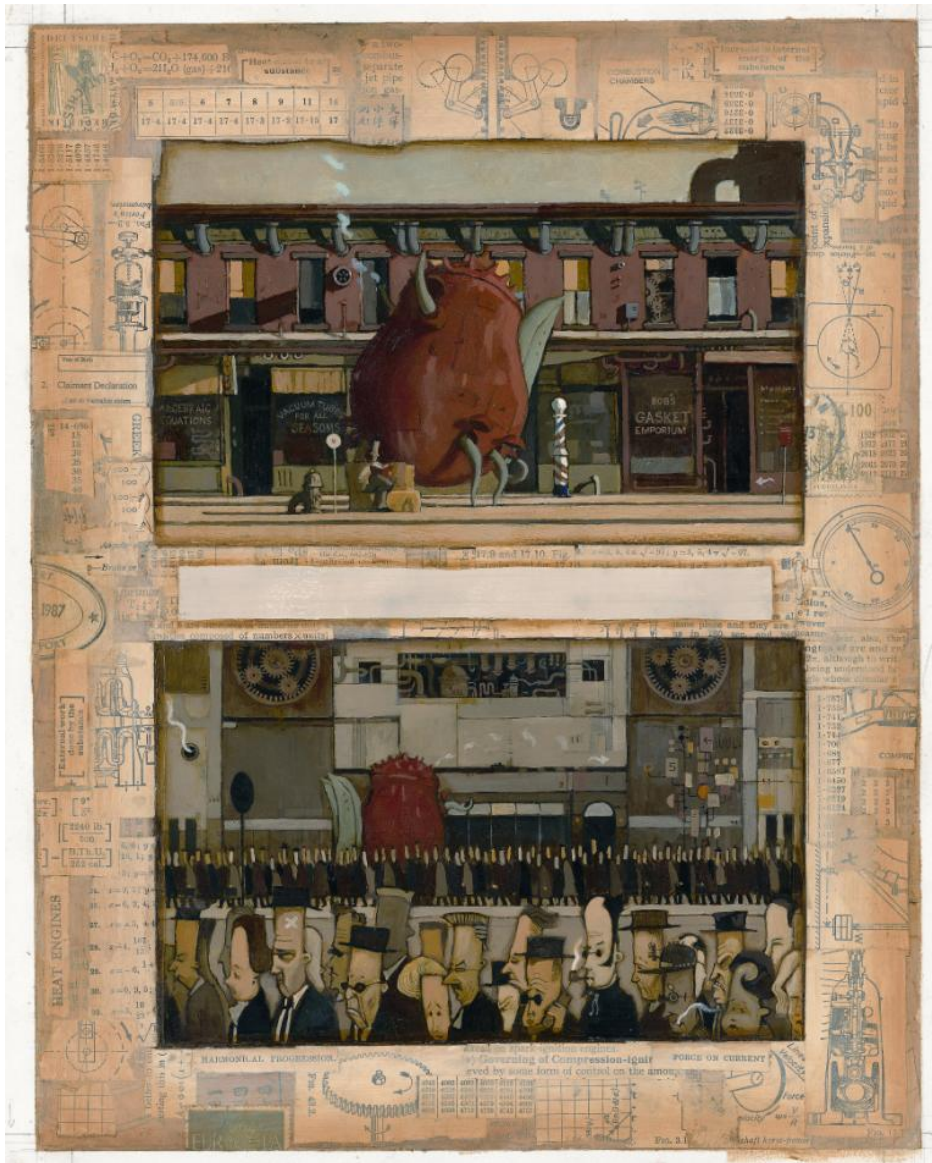
1. When designing the city, Shaun Tan was inspired by *Collins Street 5 pm*, a painting by Australian artist John Brack.

The painting is owned by the National Gallery of Victoria and you can find out more about this painting on the NGV website: <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/johnbrack/education/>

 - Why does Shaun Tan refer to this painting in his depiction of the city?



- How do the figures inspired by Collins Street 5 pm contribute to our understanding of the world where *The Lost Thing* story is set?



Courtesy Lothian Books/Hachette

Create

1. When animating the city scene inspired by Collins Street 5pm, the CG supervisor Tom Bryant 're-purposed' a set of 8-10 basic characters. He was then able to re-use assets that had already been animated, simply by changing characters' hair or clothing.
 - Draw your own generic character using a digital program. And then – with as few changes as possible -- add and take-away features to create a group of characters.
 - You might like to try adding your characters with those created by other students to make a crowd scene.



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia

FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF ODDS & ENDS

When creating the Federal Department of Odds and Ends, Shaun Tan had to find a balance between the surreal and the ordinary.

*If everything is too ordinary, people stop paying attention to some extent; they stop asking questions about what's going on... Whereas if you make it a little bit weird and you exaggerate some features, suddenly people realise the slight absurdity of some bureaucratic processes.*⁹ (You can access the rest of this discussion on Generator: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/shaun-tan-lost-thing/shaun-tan-balance-between-fantasy-and-reality>)

When making the animation, sound designer John Kassab added a further dimension to this visually weird world by using echoing sounds that emphasised the loneliness of being caught up in bureaucracy.

Respond

- Describe the key visual features of the Federal Department of Odds and Ends.
 - What are some of the exaggerated features of the Federal Department of Odds and Ends?
 - What do you think Tan might be trying to get you to notice or think about by exaggerating these features?
 - What is the connection between the Federal Department of Odds and Ends and the lines of people heading to work in the preceding image/scene?

Reflect

- Describe the little grey creature who tugs at the boy.
 - What is its role in the story?
 - Why is it so keen to help the Lost Thing?
 - Why do you think it has not followed the signs to the world of lost things?
- Every sound in an animated story has to be created from scratch.
 - How does sound contribute to the story in the scene set in the Federal Department of Odds and Ends?



- Consider this image from the book of the Federal Department of Odds and Ends, list 10 Foley sounds that would help bring this image to life? (Think about sounds you would use to convey isolation, the inhumanity of bureaucracy or the feeling lost?)



© Passion Pictures Australia and Screen Australia

3. What do you think of the entire soundscape of the film?

- Try watching a section of the animation with the sound turned off and the subtitles on and then watch it again with sound. Explain what the sound, music and/or voiceover contribute to the story.
- How does the sound in the film match up with the sounds of the world you imagined while reading the book?

Explore

1. Find out more about the meaning and function of bureaucracy and consider why certain kinds of bureaucracy are described as 'absurd', 'soulless' and 'inhuman'.

You might like to start with the discussion of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* on Shmoop

<http://www.shmoop.com/the-trial-kafka/>

- Why do you think systems originally designed to be efficient and rational sometimes end up inefficient and absurd?
- Do you have any personal experience of bureaucratic absurdity – maybe an experience at school, or trying to get your laptop fixed or trying to get a concession travel pass? Explain.

Create

1. Imagine you work at the Federal Department of Odds and Ends. Write a job description for yourself.
2. The Federal Department of Odds and Ends creates the feeling of isolation, authority and lifelessness, yet is still a place of employment for humans.
 - Imagine what an office function at the Federal Department of Odds and Ends (i.e. a Christmas party) might be like.
 - Draw or write a description that communicates the absurdity and inhumanity of this world.



3. Create your own logo in the style of the logo of the Federal Department of Odds and Ends. You can either create a logo for an unimaginative world like the one we discover in *The Lost Thing*, or you can imagine a completely different kind of world.

- What is the name of your department?
- What kind of world does it exist in?
- What is your motto?
- Why have you designed the logo in the style you have chosen?



UTOPIA

When talking about *The Lost Thing*, Shaun Tan calls the world of the lost things as Utopia, even though there is no such reference in the book or the film. A Utopia is an ideal or perfect society.

Respond

1. Creating the animated world of lost things was one of the greatest challenges faced by the animation team. As well as making the creatures depicted in the book 3 dimensional and animating them, Tan designed many new lost things.
 - Describe your response to the animated world of the lost things.
 - How does this animated world compare with the single page represented in the book? What are the similarities and what are the differences?

Reflect

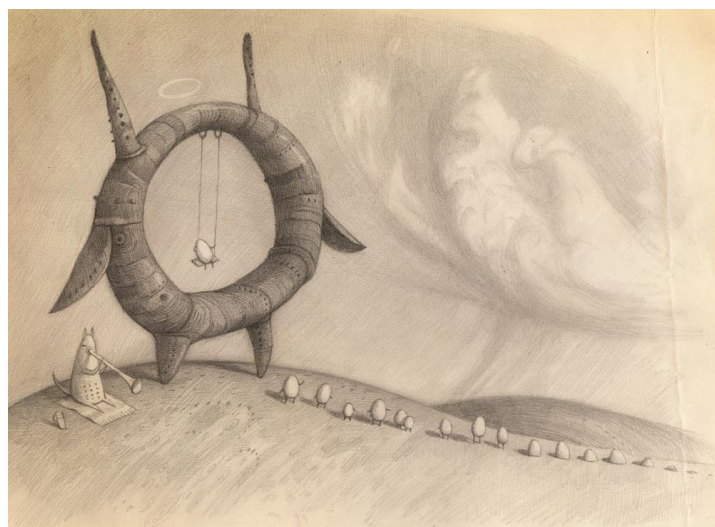
1. In describing the decisions made about the music for the film, Michael Yezerski, the composer, explains that in the Utopia scene, he had to decide between drawing attention to the oddness of the characters in this world or focusing on the story. It was decided that the music be designed in such a way that the 'audience felt the conclusion of the story'.
 - How can music make viewers 'feel' a conclusion? What music elements did Yezerski introduce to create this emotional effect in *The Lost Thing*?
 - List some other films or animations where the music adds to the sense that the story has reached a satisfying or heartfelt conclusion.
 - What happens to the music as the door closes after the boy and the Lost Thing have said goodbye?



2. What is the emotional effect on the viewer of the final scene in which we see the boy grown up? Some people argue that the animation should have left the viewer in the world of the lost things, rather than bringing them 'back down to earth'.
 - What do you think?
 - What does the concluding scene add to the story?

Explore

1. When visiting the exhibition, you will see a number of Shaun Tan's designs for the creatures that populate the world of lost things, including a collection of 3 D sculptures. As well as exploring the exhibition, visit Shaun Tan's website <http://www.shauntan.net> and *The Lost Thing* website <http://www.thelostthing.com>



© Passion Pictures Australia

- Focus on a particular creature and describe Shaun Tan's drawing style.
2. Most of Shaun Tan's work is signed – even his preliminary sketches.
 - Why do you think this is the case?
 - Why is it important for an artist to keep his/her name on their work?
 - Is this more of a challenge for people creating in a digital field.

CREATE

1. In a style and artform of your choice, make a fantasy world filled with remarkable creatures.

1 Tan, Shaun, 'Words and Pictures, an Intimate Distance', Lingua Franca, Radio National ABC, 2010
<http://www.shauntan.net/images/essayLinguaFranca.pdf>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Tan, Shaun, 'Picture Books: Who are they for?', 2002, <http://www.shauntan.net/images/whypicbooks.pdf>

5 Teaching support notes for Shaun Tan: *The Lost Thing*, Stories and More Rap,
http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/Web/13647/documents/teachnotes_tan.pdf

These notes come from a wonderful resource compiled by the State of New South Wales, Department of Education and Communities, 2011, NSW Curriculum and Learning Innovation Centre (CLIC) and can be found here:

<http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/Web/13647/>

6 Shaun Tan, interview with ACMI curator.

7 <http://www.acmi.net.au/media-shaun-tan-exhibition.htm>

8 Shaun Tan, interview with ACMI curator for Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing: From Book to Screen*, 2013.

9 Ibid.