



Take Two

2022
BEST REVIEW PRIZE
WINNERS

First Prize

Ghost Boys

Ghost Boys is an incredibly powerful and contemporary book by Jewell Parker Rhodes that covers important themes such as racial injustice, violence, and police brutality and explores how people's biases can lead to destruction – in this case fatal destruction.

It tells the achingly unfair tale of Jerome, a 12-year-old black boy from Chicago whose toy gun is mistaken for a real gun, and he is shot dead by a Police Officer without warning.

The white officer is quoted in The Chicago Tribune as saying, "I had no choice!" and "He had a gun," but as a reader we feel this statement can't be true. Whilst reading I felt frustrated and angry - Jerome has his life cruelly stolen from him at the hands of injustice. This was heightened when I later learnt the officer was not charged with any crime.

The story has an interesting dual narrative that flits between the events leading up to the moment of Jerome's death and his time as a ghost. This gives us a clearer picture of who Jerome is, his life, family and struggles at school.

We learn that Jerome was constantly hiding from bullies at school, desperate to stay out of trouble and go unnoticed. This insight into Jerome's character makes the story even more poignant as we become familiar with his gentle and unassuming nature.

We also learn that Jerome is not alone in the afterlife and his story is sadly far from unique. He meets 'hundreds and thousands' of other 'ghost boys' – black boys just like him who have met similar and unfair fates.

One is the ghost of Emmett Till, a real-life character from Michigan who was brutally murdered by a gang of white men in 1950s America. Emmett's story serves as proof that the issue of systemic racism has been ever-present in our society for over 65 years. Emmett helps Jerome realise the tragic stories of other people of colour throughout history and how they have suffered through slavery and violence.

He also provides Jerome with hope. Emmett tells him he is a ghost for a reason, that he has something important to do and can help things change. He says, "Only the living can make a change."

Each ghost boy can talk to a living person who can help them. For Jerome, it is Sarah, the daughter of the officer who shot him. He tells Sarah about the events of his death, and she realises that her father has done something terrible and then becomes an activist against racism – a fighter for social justice.

Through Sarah, Jerome and the other ghost boys can find some peace and move on from the world.

I think this is uplifting and the author is telling us that even though racism is very much alive in society today hope is not lost. The overarching theme of the book is learning. It makes us question why after over half a century; little has changed in society, but also tells us we all can make a difference.

What I loved about this book is that the story is engaging, fast and moving. I also think that Jewell Parker Rhodes was able to voice the forgotten lives of the anonymous ghost boys who died unjustly and increase our understanding of racism. She says in the book's After Word, 'I do believe that as a living person, I am obliged to honour and speak for those who can no longer speak for themselves.' - a powerful quote that embodies all that the book achieves in just 198 gripping pages.

The book furthered my understanding of how deeply rooted racial prejudice remains in society today and the emotional and compelling story stayed with me long after I finished the book.

Rhodes has a clear message for us all through Jerome when she says, 'Only the living can make the world a better place. Live and make it better.' The hopeful message I took away from the book is that all of us in some way, no matter how big or small the act, can help to make the world a better place.

Alice – Kingston Academy

DASHIELL

GHOST BOYS: A BOOK REVIEW

**A CHARACTER WHO, EVEN AS A GHOST, CHANGED
THE WAY I SEE THE WORLD**

In this short read, Jewell Parker Rhodes looks at racism and, more specifically, the killing of black children. This book uses dual perspectives (both alive and dead) to tell the story of Jerome, a black boy killed by a police officer with no warning, just because he was holding a toy gun. Jerome then goes on to meet Sarah, the daughter of the policeman who killed him, where he realises that only she can see him. Sarah thinks this has something to do with their fate, but Jerome isn't so sure and is unwilling to forgive her for her father's misdeeds.

The book is filled with symbolism, such as the fact that all these dead boys go unseen, both literally and metaphorically, and that only someone with a diverse perspective (Sarah) can see them and truly understand their struggle and story. This indirectly tells the reader that Sarah has the potential to be pivotal but also that she has a very open mind regarding racism and skin colour. This is later shown to be true repeatedly, when she weeps at the sight of Emmett Till's open casket and when she is horrified at how her father killed Jerome without warning.

The characters are all well developed (as shown in the previous paragraph) and the plot is just as well thought out, with a clear progression of the characters from the "dead" perspective and Jerome's slowly revealed backstory in the "alive" sections.

This book also educates the reader about the continued problem of racism and racism in the police force, a very current issue and one about which we should all be more informed.

The only downside of this book for me is its length. It was just too short for me, even though I admit that its length makes it more accessible for those who aren't as invested in reading as I am. To make up for its short length I read it twice, trying to find figurative language and symbolism. Needless to say, I was surprised when I realised just how much of it there was. Other than that, I found this book to be educational, fantastic and gripping.

In conclusion, this is an amazing short story which I highly recommend, though if you are an avid reader, I would certainly take the time to read it again. I'm giving this book (ghost boys) a solid 9 ghosts out of 10.

Dashiell - Ibstock Place School

Second Prize

Life of Pi

You can never forget the moment when the goat dies. Pi, the book's central character, has grown up in a zoo in India, and one morning his father decides to teach him and his brother a lesson. He takes them to the cage of a magnificent Bengal tiger, Manisha, and declares, 'I'm going to teach you how dangerous tigers are'. The goat, whose eyes are 'spinning orbs' is let into the cage and jumps around before the tiger sinks his jaws into it and the blood starts to flow.

'Life of Pi' is a playful novel, but it's important never to forget how dangerous the animals are. It revolves around a boy who is named after a swimming pool 'Piscine Molitor Patel', and renames himself as 'Pi' to stop people pronouncing his name like 'Pissing'. Pi upsets his parents when he experiments with not one religion but three – Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. It's the 1980s and because of problems in India his family decides to sail to Canada; when the ship they are on sinks the book turns from a comedy about growing up to an unusual tale about survival.

The biggest question is how much is real and how much takes place in the narrator's imagination. He must survive on a small boat in the Pacific Ocean, with a zebra, a hyena, an orang-utang and a tiger called Richard Parker. One question raised by the goat scene is how a boy can stay alive in the middle of the ocean for 227 days with a hungry Bengal tiger.

Richard Parker is fascinating. He doesn't talk – except for in Pi's imagination towards the end. What's most important is what he means to Pi; he starts off being an object of fear but then becomes an object of comfort. 'A part of me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger,' Pi says. This is interesting, because we are made to think about the fact that feeling no hope is worse than being scared.

The worst moment is when Pi is being interviewed in a hospital in Mexico by two officials investigating why the ship sank. They tell Pi they don't believe his story. Then he tells them a different story about being stranded on the ocean, where he witnesses a bullying cook, a sailor whose leg is amputated for fish bait, cannibalism and the murder of his mother.

It's a brief part of a book which overall spends more time talking about the wonders of the world than its horrors. Yet it makes us realise that sometimes the stories people tell are more important for their future than reality. Yann Martel's story fills your head with luminous fish and islands with people-eating trees. It's a story for a world so obsessed by rationalism that sometimes it forgets that other ways of thinking might be better.

Fergus - City of London School

TSBA READING GROUP



The Arrival by Shaun Tan



What Is The Story About?

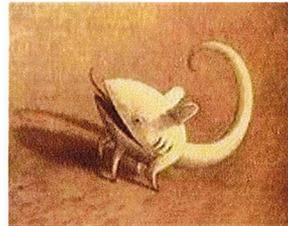
A wordless novel about a family struggling with poverty. This forces the dad to leave his family to try and find a better life for them in a foreign land across the sea. A journey filled with both heartbreak and heart-warming moments

The story is told through a series of beautifully drawn sketches. Here's my wordless review!

How Is The Artwork In The Book?



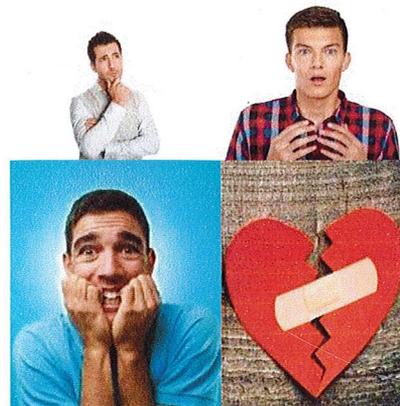
My Favourite Character In The Book?



Did You Miss The Words?



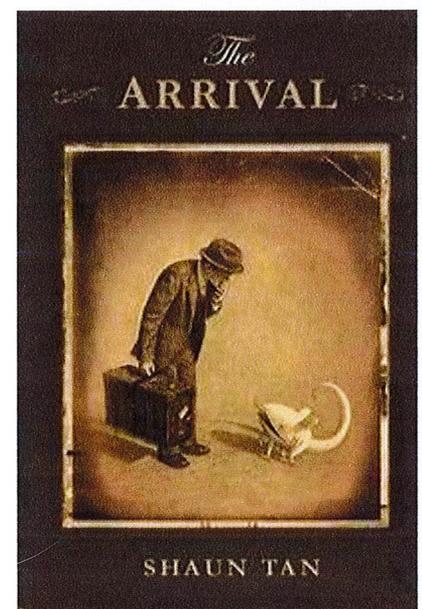
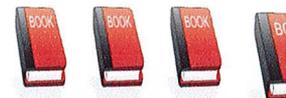
How Did The Book Make You Feel...



Would You Recommend This Book To Your Friends?



My Book Rating (Out of 5)



Reviewed By Kit
Bexley Grammar School

A review of 'The Arrival' by Shaun Tan (Alexandria)

Highly Commended

Kingston Grammar School

The Arrival by Shaun Tan is a graphic novel about a futuristic immigrant. A man leaves his wife and daughter to find a better life for all of them. The man travels into a different world that is darker and filled with strange creatures and boats that sail in the sky. The book explores the darker side to immigration, most people see immigration as people from less fortunate backgrounds coming for easier and better lives, however Shaun Tan has shown us a side that it is really difficult and people feel very alone, and surrounded by a sort endless labyrinth of darkness and loneliness.

I was really looking forward to reading this book because I really enjoy art and I know from previously reading his book 'The Red Tree', that Shaun Tan's drawing and painting skills are incredible. In all of his books so far, Shaun Tan has been able to capture the expressions really well and that is something I love about his work. I was curious to see whether Tan could engage a teenage audience in a 'picture' book as young people prefer to read a story, or read manga-type books. Art is a universal language that everybody can appreciate, and can interpret how they want, so it was interesting to see how Shaun Tan could approach a current issue like immigration through the artwork in his book.

From an artistic perspective, Shaun Tan's use of colour, and also lack of colour is very interesting. For example, when he is leaving his wife and daughter, he only uses black and white to portray the mood even more and add a very sombre tone to it, the characters expressions are also very forlorn. However when something wonderful, good, or exciting happens, he adds yellow and oranges which are warmer tones, so immediately you feel more hopeful, the characters on these page have wonderful, hopeful or even happy expressions. In this book, I also really like the way Shaun Tan uses different angles of his drawings, for example when it is an extreme emotion he usually does a small close up drawing of the person's face, and when it is a large landscape or something strange or ominous, he does a giant drawing of it. I can relate to fear at times seeming really huge as if to devour you. The larger drawings do seem to show the main character as so small compared to the world around.

At the beginning of the book, everything in the house seems normal, however when the main character gets to the new place, Shaun Tan introduces some strange creatures and strange landscape views. This could have a literal meaning of it is genuinely set in a different day and age, but it could also mean that everything is different for the immigrants and they are entering a new strange place that is difficult to understand. This adds to the sense of loneliness and isolation despite the fact that there are other characters.

Shaun Tan's use of the pages and paper is incredibly effective at moving along the story, but also portraying the emotions of the characters. Not only does he have the interesting texture and style of the background paper, referring to the original refugees, he also draws paper a lot to convey a message. On the very first page Shaun Tan has a picture of a drawing that seems to have been drawn by the little girl, this shows that the family is close and it will be difficult staying away for an unknown amount of time. There is another drawing which for me says the most, which is the origami bird that looks ready to take flight. Generally a bird symbolizes new beginnings, hope and most importantly a sort of promised land. I think that this was an effective beginning to the story as it already says so much. The next use of paper is when the main character is writing in his diary and then folding it up into a paper bird. I think this is a metaphorical way of saying something plain and normal can become something beautiful, but also that the words have a freedom that the immigrant does not. Shaun Tan also shows us how paper is important in communication, when the immigrant is trying to explain his situation, but no one understands him, so he resorts to drawing it instead.

For the TSBA, the theme this year is 'Second Chances', and I think that this theme really relates to the book. The book is based around an immigrant moving away to try and find a better life. In the book, the immigrant is getting a second chance at a good life and he is seizing the opportunity. Not only is this book very good at getting across the story and emotions of the immigrant, I feel that I was also able to relate to this book in a small way as my grandfather had to leave his country of birth and start a new life in England. It must have been daunting to leave your home and carve out a new life. The book also made me think about personal experiences where I have been given a second chance and I have taken it.

In conclusion, I think that this is a really good book and I would definitely recommend it to all of my friends.

Review – Whitgift School - The Arrival - Oliver

The Arrival by Shaun Tan was a different and interesting book because it was graphic novel with no words. I thought Tan's idea was excellent and unique because it portrayed not just a story but someone's detailed perspective.

The metaphor of the book was one I had never seen or read before because the main character was in this world in which everything seemed alien to him. I understood all these made-up creatures, languages and cityscapes were not actually real but just what the man sees them as. The pictures are not in first person; however, Shaun Tan does well in drawing the man's feelings and expressions. The variety of pictures were also intriguing because they might start off zoomed in on the man's face but then zoom out and showed a massive city with extremely large buildings in strange shapes.

Tan also did well in conveying the plot throughout because he changed the outline of the pictures showing it was a flashback or he might draw a very zoomed out shot to portray the feeling of isolation and aloneness. He also drew pictures which again were not what was actually happening but a metaphor of what was happening. For example, if there was a rainstorm, Tan was able to draw giant humans and show them watering the city. This of course, is not what is happening but what it felt like. All of Tan's features in the pictures make you feel like you are the man because you are almost in his shoes feeling his emotions.

I would not recommend this book for anyone under the age of 11 because the book could be quite difficult to understand because it is a big metaphor. Though I would rate this 4 out of 5 stars whilst it is hard to compare to other books because it is a very different format.

Oliver - Whitgift School

Highly Commended

The Foreshadowing

Do you like spoilers? With *The Foreshadowing* by Marcus Sedgewick, you can enjoy the feeling of a friend telling you that a major character died several times without having to make friends in the first place. You might feel like the premise (the main character has visions of other people's death) is just spoilers, but it is implemented in a way that is believable and not jarring. The method in which these premonitions appear feels natural (by natural I mean how you would expect it to happen; obviously knowing whether someone is going to die is not natural) through an unconscious feeling, vision or dream. The heroine of the book is likable and her actions believable. That is something that could be said for most of the book – except for the future seeing – like the natural dialogue or the historical details.

Even one moment when the character is imprisoned and then rescued, which could feel like it was a *deus ex machina* if written by a less skilled author, is in fact more like fate (a key idea in the book; you cannot have a foreseeable future without fate) than an attempt to write the character out of an unescapable (literally) situation. If I have one gripe with the plot, it would be the way that our protagonist disguises herself as a red cross nurse with very little prior training. However, the book itself even points out the incredulous nature of this necessary plot element and her disguise fails some way through the book. I found it slightly immersion-breaking, but not very.

Don't let the wartime setting of the book put you off: although I would recommend it to a war history buff, I would also recommend it to someone who perhaps does not like these types of stories so much (like me) because of the amazing premise and plot.

It's not necessary to have the 'curse' of looking into the future to know that if you read it, you would love it.

Joseph – Dulwich College