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The Lost Thing

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Shaun Tan's hero is, mostly, a bottle-top collector. Once, however, when he was out down by the beach collecting bottle-tops, he found a Lost Thing. It was friendly enough, though melancholy. So our hero took it home, and then to the Federal Department of Odds and Ends, where he was given several reams of forms to fill in. All of which gives no sense at all of the visual and mental excitement, not to say challenge, of this picture book. The city surrounding the bottle-top hunter is a maelstrom of steaming, rusting plumbing, of Lowryesque citizens hurrying about their gloomy business through grey canyons of conformity and bureaucracy. Tan's reader-viewers (from older children to adults) need to look closely -- and then to look again. Here and there, painted on a road surface or a wall, usually pointing away from where our hero is headed, is a tiny white arrowhead with a wavy tail. And that symbol is also on a card which an anonymous little cleaning machine hands to the collector as he clutches the mountain of forms in the Department. The arrow trail leads him and the Lost Thing through the city to a doorway, beyond which lies a Dali-esque, blue-skied SOMEWHERE populated by other Things which don't fit in. The collector goes back to his bottle-tops, leaving his friend behind since it seemed to like it there. Every now and again, the storyteller thinks he sees something else which looks a bit lost; but less and less often as he grows older. 'Too busy doing other stuff, I guess.' The visual techniques of this book are constantly exciting, making us work (and play) and smile as we explore. Images appear as collages, mounted against the grinding, age-browened pages of 'Dad's old physics and engineering text books' (it says, squeezed in sideways in minute letters, on the sort-of title page). A puzzle of a text which the reader versed in the games of some contemporary illustrators, would surely take away for close, reflective and satisfying perusal.

Running Order:

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