



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower primary (K-2) and Primary (3-6)

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Creative Arts, HSIE
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Visual literacy.

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- To discuss new vocabulary, respond to texts and share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts.
- To learn and understand more about friendship and love, through good and not-so-good times.
- To understand the importance of memories.
- To help understand about personal loss.
- An opportunity to discuss fears and hardships and how we can help ourselves and others to overcome them.
- To use and experiment with different materials, and create artworks to communicate ideas to an audience.

## THEMES

- Friendship
- Love
- Memories
- Grief & dealing with loss
- Hope
- Empathy
- Nature

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Christopher Cheng

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

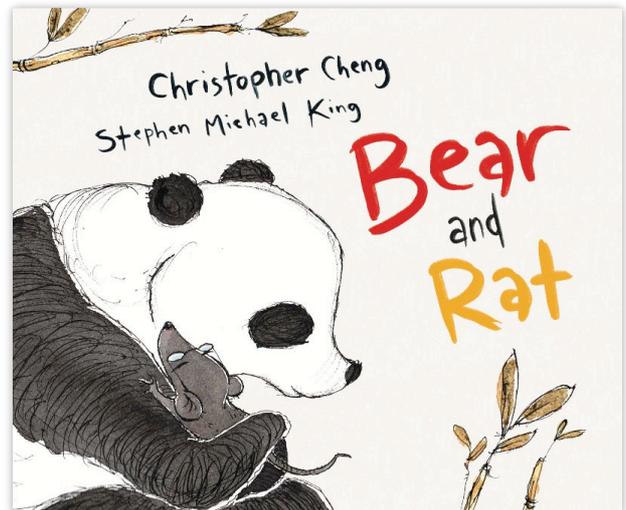
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# BEAR and RAT

Christopher Cheng & Stephen Michael King



## PLOT SUMMARY

Bear and Rat are the best of friends who do everything together, but Rat wonders if Bear will always be there to hold her hand, no matter what happens ...

**A powerful and uplifting story about loving friendship, even through the hardest of times...**

Christopher Cheng (right) and Stephen Michael King



(Photo: Heather Curdie)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher Cheng is an award-winning children's author who writes fiction and non-fiction full time, conducts workshops and visits schools. He has a Master of Arts in Children's Literature and has been a Literacy Ambassador for the Federal Government's Literacy and Numeracy Week initiative and the 2012 National Year of Reading. His picture book, *One Tree*, illustrated by Bruce Whatley, was shortlisted for the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the 2020 Environment Award for Children's Literature. *Bear and Rat* is a loving tribute to Christopher's late wife, Bini.

## A personal note from Christopher

Nearly all the picture books I write have a personal element to them, where something has had a direct impact on me ... and none will ever be more so than this manuscript. When my wife Bini was diagnosed with cancer I needed some form of understanding, some comprehension, some way of relating to the new journey we were embarking on, about the now, and about what might happen. And as a writer for kids, creating this story was the only way I had of working through this, or expressing my thoughts and feelings. And the characters...they are very personal too, as Bini's favourite has always been the Rat, and mine of course is Bear.



## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Stephen Michael King** is renowned worldwide for illustrating picture books including *The Pocket Dogs* and *The Man Who Loved Boxes*. Books he has both written and illustrated include *A Bear and a Tree*, *Leaf*, *Rainbow Bear*, *Mutt Dog*, *Snail and Turtle are Friends* and, most recently, *Three*, a CBCA Honours book. Many of his books have been shortlisted by the CBCA, and have won, or appeared frequently on, children's own voting lists such as YABBA. Stephen has illustrated many stories for the Penguin Random House Aussie Nibbles series and has most recently embarked on some crazy pirating adventures with Andrew Daddo for the *Atticus Van Tasticus* junior fiction series before illustrating the deeply heartfelt picture book, *Bear and Rat* by Christopher Cheng.

## A special note from Stephen

When I first read *Bear and Rat*, I wrote 'elemental' on the edge of the manuscript. The opening scene with the wind was one of my first sketches. It gave the characters a lightness of being, a youthfulness that needed expression early in the text. As the story progresses, we see metaphorical moves through the seasons of change. The two characters journey to their unknown destination, prepared with tea and umbrellas; but when the rain comes, they're defenseless. *Rat* is gently carried through to the last page. It brews my emotions every time I read it. Rarely does a story this authentic come my way. Rarely do I feel as privileged to illustrate a project. I hope the world notices its nuances, and that *Bear and Rat* find their way into the hearts of everyone.



## THEMES

### Friendship

What do you think a friend is? What are some things you love doing with your friends? What are some of the things you do to help your friends? Can you remember a time when a friend has helped you?

### Love

Who or what do you love? Describe how you feel when you love someone?

### Memories

Memories are important because they remind us of the people and places we love. Sometimes we take photos so we can remember happy times or beautiful places, or remember people who we might not see all the time. Do you have any photos that represent different memories in your life? What are some of your memories? What do you remember of your first day of school? The best holiday you ever had? A birthday party? A memory of being brave, or being scared? A memory of welcoming someone new, or saying goodbye to a friend?

Are all the memories those that you want to keep? Are they all happy? Why is it important to remember?



## Hope

Children can discuss what they hope for in the future. Something they hope for themselves, for their family, a friend, or for the world/planet.

## Empathy

What does empathy mean? What are some ways we can understand how someone else is feeling? How do you feel when someone understands how you are feeling? Discuss things you might do when a friend is sad or angry or lonely.

Students discuss what makes them sad, angry or lonely. How is this shown? What does it do to them; to those around them? Discuss is it okay to have these emotions.

Is the story happy or sad and what suggests this to them? Does *Bear and Rat* have an ending and is the journey for Bear and Rat resolved?

## Nature

What are some of the different types of nature we see in *Bear and Rat*? What kind of weather? Do you have a favourite place in nature? It could be your own back garden, a park, a beach, or somewhere you might have been for a holiday.

Consider the idea of travelling through the seasons as a metaphor for grief . . . autumn, to winter, to spring . . . and onward. For further guidance refer to: <https://www.goodgrief.org.au/seasons-for-growth>

## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the front cover of the book. Look at the illustration. Describe the characters. What are the two characters doing? What emotions are they showing? How does it make you feel? Now read out the book's title. Putting the title and the illustration together, what do you think the book might be about? Why do you think the illustrator has the larger character on the front and back covers? Create a list of feelings (words or phrases) about this book. Where might this book be set?
2. Read the blurb at the back of the book. What do you feel about it? What kind of things are you now expecting to see inside the book? What questions do you have? Suggest one word to describe what this book might be about. As a class create a list of your words.
3. On the inside of the front and back covers are pages called the endpapers. Do you like to look at clouds to see what shapes you can find? It's a great game to do outside with friends.
4. Just inside the cover, after the endpapers, are some illustrated pages before the start of the story. What do those pages in the front of the book show you? What do they add to what you've already guessed about the story? How do the illustrations connect with the first pages of the story?
5. Identify all the features on the spine. What do the red and yellow circles represent?
6. Book creators often include dedications. What insights do the dedications in *Bear and Rat* give students about this story?

## POST-READING QUESTIONS

1. Have you changed your idea about the red and yellow circles on the spine? How important are they in the book?
2. Describe the characters now. How have your descriptions changed? Why is Bear and Rat's friendship-so important? Discuss how Bear reacts to Rat's questions.
3. Make another list of feelings (words or phrases) after listening to this book-and compare them to your first list.
4. Discuss those feelings portrayed in the book. Describe when you have had these feelings or emotions.
5. What moments in the narrative are joyful and happy? Describe them. What ways have the creators shown these emotions?
6. Discuss the themes that the students identified from this book. Create a list of words. Create a mind map. Is there any difference between the beginning and ending of the book?
7. Produce a multimedia presentation about the themes and the journey that Bear and Rat undertake.
8. Throughout the book Rat asks a series of questions. Why? What is she trying to work out? Do you think Bear gives the answers that Rat is hoping for? In what ways?
9. Do you think Bear understands what Rat means by '*going where Bear can't come*'? Discuss where Rat might be going? How do you think the characters feel? What techniques have the creators used to show this emotional journey?
10. In the text the author describes how he will carry Rat while pointing to various parts of his body. How would that be possible? Discuss with students how they might work through the loss of something like a pet, friend who moves away, a house or school they may move from etc.
11. If you were going on a walk with your best friend where would you go? What would you talk about?



# Bear and Rat by Christopher Cheng and Stephen Michael King

Write this journey in the conversational style of *Bear and Rat*.

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### English

#### Activity

- Exploring a visual narrative:**
  - Before reading the text of the story, try looking at all the illustrations first and ask the children to tell their version of the story. (See also 'Reading *Bear and Rat*' on p6 of these notes.)
  - Now go back and read the text with the illustrations – how different does the story feel now? What extra things in the illustrations tell us more about the story than when we just read the words?
- New Words:**

Can you find three words in the book that are new to you? Try to work out what they mean from the context (the way they are used and what other words are around them).

#### Question

- We all have memories. Can you think of some happy, and one or two sad memories that you have? You could write them down, or draw them, or even draw how they make you feel.
- Summarise each spread using one sentence. How are they the same/different to the sentences written by other class members? As a class decide on one sentence to summarise each spread.
- Now compose one word for each spread to describe the emotion shown, e.g. happy, sad, joyful, funny etc. How are they the same/different to other class members?
- What does the metaphor '*dam might burst*' mean? List other metaphors that you can think of. Create a table of metaphors and meanings.
- Bear and Rat* is a picture book text that is a conversation between the two characters. Discuss why the author might write this story as a conversation. Rewrite this story as a narrative.
- In pairs, record a conversation about having dinner last night (or something else appropriate, like the way they went home from school). Now transcribe the conversation into *Bear and Rat* conversation format.
- Discuss ways of speaking (whispering, shouting, yelling, etc). When would these be used?
- Create a travelogue (list) of all the places/environments Bear and Rat visit through

this book. Students could find real world examples of this places.

- Read the story without the illustrations. What emotions or feelings are conveyed? Compare this to a reading of the story with the illustrations. Discuss and create a list of similarities or differences in the reading style and in the interpretation of the story?

### Nature

#### From the illustrator

My studio sits low, on the other side of an orchard; it's a barefoot walk down the hill from my house. Depending on the time of day and the year, there's visiting wildlife; wrens, finches, honeyeaters, the odd goanna, echidna or wallaby.

#### Questions

- Do you have a special place in nature that you like to visit? Have you seen any wildlife there?
- If you think about this place and use all your senses, how would you describe what it looks like? Sounds like? Feels like? You could write about it or do a drawing.

#### Activities

- Walk around the school/kindergarten and find some treasures from nature – seedpods, small flowers, stones, leaves etc.
- Use the treasures from nature to paint pictures related to feelings about the book.

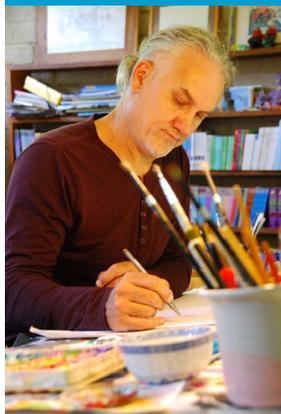


### Creative Arts

From Stephen: I grew up like most children, apart from the fact that I had hearing loss. It made school a little difficult, but hearing loss opened my eyes to observing the world. I loved to draw and make things: scissors, sticky tape, glue, paper and pens were my preferred tools of communication; and story books were my window into language.



## Bear and Rat by Christopher Cheng and Stephen Michael King



My studio is usually a mess. During any project I tend to throw paper all over the floor, pile up sketches, spread paint and ink all over the place. Occasionally it's clean, that's the few days in-between projects when I need to reclaim territory.

*Bear and Rat* was created using pencil, watercolour and ink on watercolour paper. For some of the inking, Stephen used bamboo shoots cut and made especially for the project.

### Questions

1. Stephen often includes a small bird in his illustrations. Find them in *Bear and Rat*. Why might they be important?
2. Artists use colours to show feelings and emotions. What colours are used to show the feelings and emotions through *Bear and Rat*?
3. For the black ink lines in some illustrations Stephen has used cut bamboo shoots to 'draw'. In which illustrations might he have used this technique? What effect does it create? Why might he have used this technique? Discuss how students might utilise this technique. Try painting with different implements, maybe some from nature. What effect does this have on your illustrations?
4. The background for many of the illustrations is created in different colours. Discuss the feelings and emotions this portrays and how it impacts the story.
5. Stephen has used quite a lot of white space in some illustrations. What effect does this have?
6. Stephen says: *Why did I paint clouds as endpapers, when there are no clouds in the body-of-the-book? Having endpaper clouds added an ethereal touch. It's another pondering/ taking time moment, giving the readers something to think about that I might not even have the answers to.*  
Discuss how the endpapers might make a difference to your interpretation of the book.

### Activities

1. **Choose an illustration from inside the book** and create your own version of Stephen's illustration adding in clouds.
2. **Create a diorama** - use cardboard to cut out figures or other elements to create a diorama of a

memory of someone you love. Use paints or colouring pencils, or even collage elements, to help create and decorate your diorama. (Perhaps combine your walk around the school or kindergarten with collecting some collage materials from nature.)

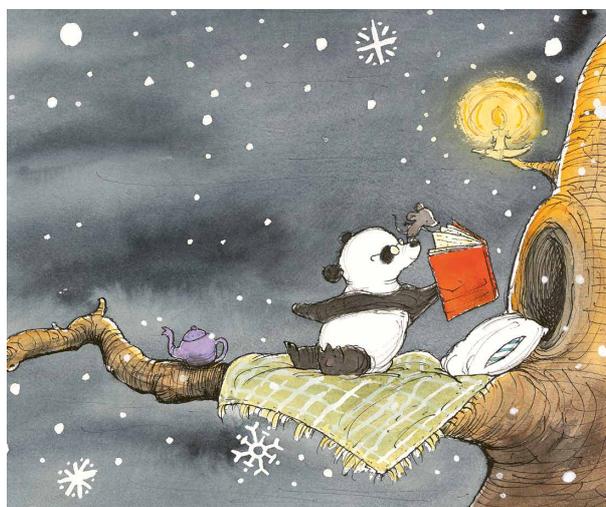
3. **Draw or paint a picture, or even create a mini play** to show a time when you helped a friend.



### Music

1. Can you find or compose music that could be played while doing a reading of this story? Describe what this music is. What makes this music appropriate?

## READING BEAR AND RAT



While you're reading the story with the class, here are some questions you might ask for each spread.

### Page 2 and 3

Identify the author. Identify the illustrator

What are the characters doing? What effect does the white space have on the page?

Discuss the title page and the lettering that Stephen has used? How have the title and names been written? What does this suggest?

Discuss the symbol below the word Rat. Why might the author have included this in his books? Do you think



## *Bear and Rat* by Christopher Cheng and Stephen Michael King

that the author's Chinese ancestry has had an influence on the style of the book? In what ways?

What do you think is happening to the characters on these pages? What gives you that idea?

### Page 4 and 5

What kind of weather is happening in this spread?

What time of year do you think it is? Why?

Identify all the objects in this illustration. What suggests movement? What might Rat be wondering? Why was the text split over two pages?

Why is Rat asking so many questions? Why does Bear ask so few?

### Page 6 and 7

What are some of the things talked about so far that can mean someone is getting older?

What are Bear and Rat doing? Describe their relationship. Examine where Stephen has placed the text. What does this indicate about what is happening

### Page 8 and 9

Do you like spooky stories? Does it help to hold someone's hand when you feel scared of something? Why?

Does anyone in your family snore? What does it sound like?

How has Stephen indicated night? Suggest a book that Bear might be reading. List some spooky scary stories that you know. Why would Rat want Bear to hold her hand? What is Rat doing? What is Bear using to help read the book and where are they from?

### Page 10 and 11

What time of year do you think it is now? Have you ever been in the snow? Ask someone who has seen snow to describe what it looks and feels like to a person who has never seen or felt it.

Describe this illustration. How are Bear and Rat crossing the river? How do you think the characters are feeling? How does the white space in this illustration enhance the emotion of the book?

### Page 12 and 13

This is called a 'bird's eye view' of the scene. Why?

Who is under the red umbrella and who is under the yellow one? How do you know that?

Which direction have Bear and Rat come from? How can you tell?

Why do the characters have open umbrellas? Describe what is happening. Describe the footprints (size, position etc). When could Rat stub her toe? What does *crotchety* mean? What other word could be used to

give the same meaning? Show how someone would be crotchety. When have you been crotchety?

### Page 14 and 15

How do you feel when you do something really bad? What did you do about it? Could you tell a friend or someone in your family? Do you think it helps to tell someone you love and trust when you've done something you know you shouldn't have?

What could be a bad thing that Rat might have done? What are Bear and Rat doing? Why is Rat *whispering* to Bear in the first stanza? How does Bear respond to Rat?

### Page 16 and 17

What kind of forest is shown here? Have you seen these kinds of plants before? What country does it make you think of?

Who is under the umbrellas?

Why might Rat have to travel to the far side of the forest? Why might Bear need to hold Rat's hand?

### Pages 18 – 19 and Pages 20 – 21

Has anyone you love been hurt or sick and had to stay in bed or go to hospital? What are some of the ways you could help someone who is hurt or sick?

### Pages 18 – 19

What are Bear and Rat doing? What objects are in this illustration? Where have these items been all through the story? How might the umbrellas stay connected like this? What are Bear and Rat eating? Students could discuss what they would take to eat on a journey.

### Page 20 and 21

Looking carefully at the illustration, where do you think Bear and Rat are going next? (Turn to the next page to find out!)

What are Bear and Rat doing? Describe the weather conditions. Why do you think that Bear asks Rat if she will take care if he gets sick? Discuss with students who looks after them when they are sick and what the carer does.

### Page 22 and 23

Have you ever had to say goodbye to someone you love? Maybe a friend who moved away? How did you feel?

What does *ponder* mean? Why might Bear stop to ponder? How does Stephen show this in the illustration? Why might Rat be holding an open umbrella? Why are the characters not looking at each other? What might they be looking at? (Hint: what do



you do when you're pondering/thinking about something?)

### Page 24 and 25

Do you think it's important to cry sometimes? How do you feel after you've had a cry? What's a special time you've shared with a friend or your family?

Bear says that he will be *sadder than sad* when he can't go with Rat. What does he mean by that phrase? What emotions/expressions might he show?

What games might Bear and Rat have played; what places might they have seen; what stories might they have told? Why is Bear reaching down to Rat? In what ways could Bear carry Rat?

### Page 26 and 27

Where is Bear pointing in these three illustrations? What do you think Bear means when he says he'll carry Rat with him in those places?

Why do you think Stephen has not included a background behind these illustrations?

### Page 28 and 29

How does the background affect the emotion of this page, especially following on from the previous spread? What technique has Stephen used? Describe what Bear and Rat are doing?

Think about a special friend? What makes them special? What are some of your most special memories together? Why do you think it's raining in the illustration on this page?

### Page 30 and 31

Where do you think Bear and Rat are going?

Why might Bear be carrying Rat? Where to?

### Page 32

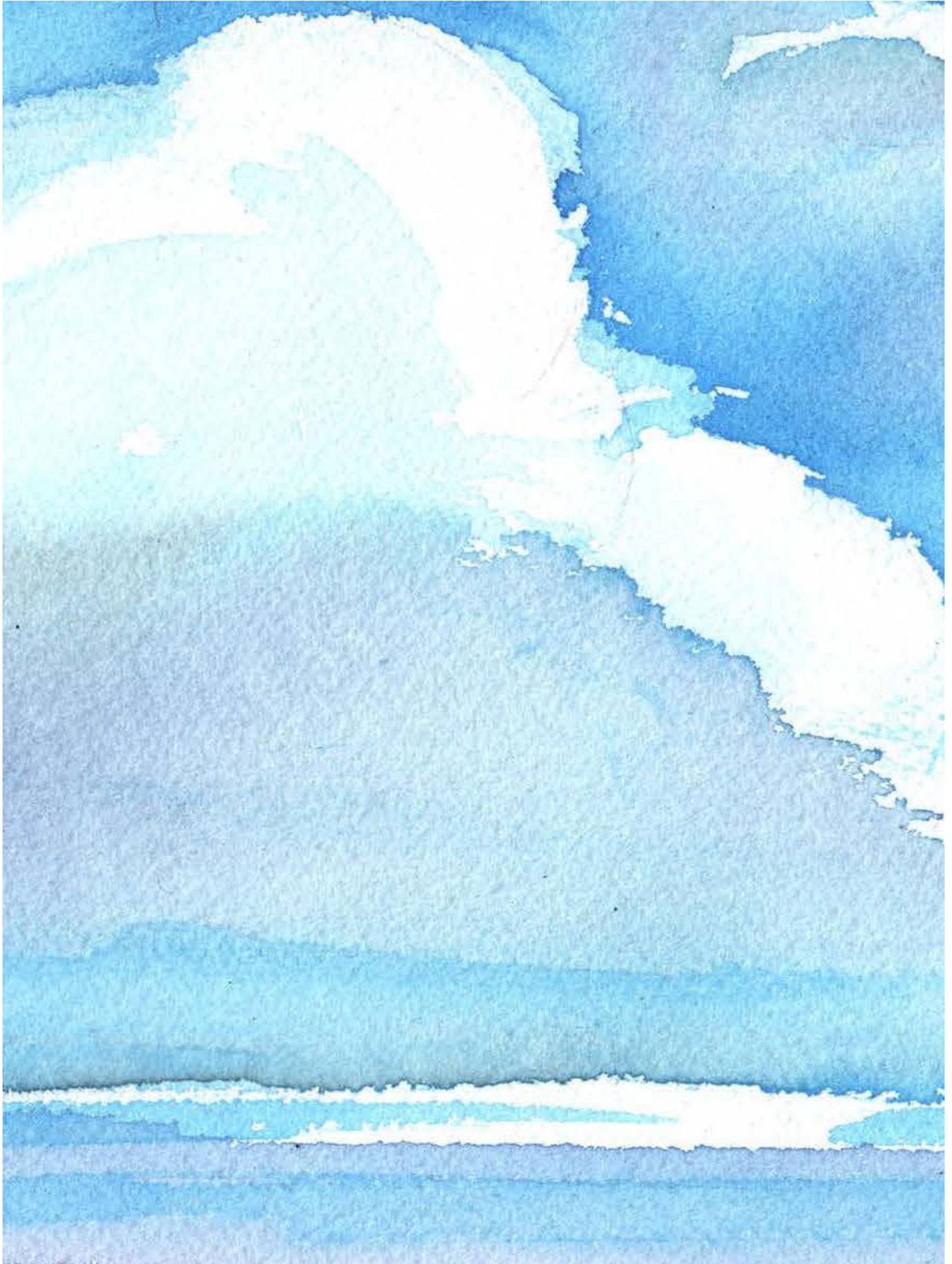
What does 'for ever' mean to you?

Describe what is happening. Where are Bear and Rat now? What is the significance of this illustration? What could happen next?





# Bear and Rat WORKSHEETS



## BEAR AND RAT CHAT

Using this page, list all the questions that Rat asked Bear.  
Now write your own responses to Rat's questions...

**Rat Asked...**

**Your Reply...**



## MY BEST FRIEND

Complete these clouds about your best friend.

Name:

Favourite FOOD

Favourite COLOUR

Favourite WORD

Picture or drawing of  
your FRIEND:

Favourite ANIMAL

Favourite GAME



## WHAT MAKES A FRIEND?

Think about what makes a really terrific friend and then fill in this chart:)

Friends WILL ... \_\_\_\_\_

Friends WON'T ... \_\_\_\_\_





## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Bear and Rat	Christopher Cheng & Stephen Michael King	9781760896287	Pre-2	\$24.99		
One Tree	Christopher Cheng & Bruce Whatley	9780143786733	K-2	\$24.99		
Don't Forget	Jane Godwin & Anna Walker	9781761040955	K-2	\$19.99		
Finding Francois	Gus Gordon	9780143794141	K-2	\$24.99		
In a Jar	Deborah Marcero	9780525514596	K2	\$29.99		
Go Go & the Silver Shoes	Jane Godwin & Anna Walker	9780143785521	K-2	\$24.99		
The Puffin Book of Bedtime Stories (featuring <i>A Bear and a Tree</i> by Stephen Michael King)	8 picture books in one, by various authors	9780143796732	K-2	\$29.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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