



THE FIVE ISLANDS

By Roberto Piumini

The plot in brief:

In a corner of paradise, in the middle of the ocean, there are five little islands, where people live in peace.

The **Madas** and the **Temés** have always lived together in perfect harmony: The former are farmers, grow wheat and make bread; the latter are fishermen and sail on the transparent waters from which they get their food.

This mechanism is virtuous: Nobody feels better than the other and the mutual exchange of bread and fish is like an ancient ritual with a deep meaning of complementary civilization.

Sai is a ten-year old Mada kid, who feels at ease among the golden spikes, like everyone in his tribe. But on a sad day **Bem**, the **Temés' leader**, plants a banner in the **Mada's territory**. Maybe he incautiously ate the black

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fish, which make people lose their mind, anyway he suddenly wants to conquer everything. He wants to own all the islands and that everybody becomes his slave.

The war seems inevitable. To avoid it, Sai will have to face and win all his fears: The old wise Samas will reveal him a magical secret, hidden in the blue deeps, which can bring back the reason. A poetic story resembling a fairy tale, an enchanting writing, and immortal archetypes for a timeless sweet-sour plot, which is also very actual and written by one of the most famous and brilliant Italian kids' writers.



The plot in detail:

The beginning is idyllic: A small **atol of uncontaminated islands**, a bunch of huts inhabited by quiet people devoted to their jobs, sea, sun and wonderful nature. Two communities - the Madas and the Temés — who have always lived together, proud of their diversities, in perfect harmony.

As in a painting by Gauguin, the pages of the book make exotic flowers bloom, show beautiful fish and shining shells, paint a blue sea and a blue sky.

When Bem, the Temés' leader, decides to subjugate his Mada neighbors and begins his conquest strategy, the young Sai is only a light-hearted boy that make kites fly and follows the seagulls' flight.

The Temé kids and the Mada kids are friends and their different skills have always been known by everybody.

The Temé joke while leaving the beach:

«Madas, when will you learn to swim and fish?»

«When you learn to sow and make the bread!» The Madas reply.

Everybody laughs and their laughters blend in with the waves, like flocks of invisible seagulls.

Bem becomes aggressive and everything changes.

Because the Temés can swim and sail, which the Madas can't do: They can speak with the earth and convince it to generate some good wheat for everyone.

But nothing is unchangeable: Sai, a Mada kid, learned to swim from the old and wise Samas, who revealed to him this secret and some others. Then he gets kidnapped from Bem, who wants to force him to cultivate wheat for the Temés. **Sai is not afraid of water like his people.** Not only he can float, but he can swim underwater and in the deep of a mysterious lagoon he will discover a wonderful but terrible secret: The five islands are like flowers that have come to the surface from a huge submerged coral tree. The silent keepers of this miracle of nature are massive whales, who know and see everything.

When Bem's insanity bursts, **little Sai gets to stop him:** The whales will cut the coral branch that keeps the Temés' island anchored and will send it astray with all the threats, quenching every undue thirst of unjust power.

The novel

Report, fairy tale, parabola or symbol? This book is everything!

It's the exemplary story of how conflicts ensue, of the insignificance of evil, of the nonsense of the longing for power. («You ate the flesh of the black fish, which produces insanity!» The Mada leader yells at the Temé attacker, trying to find a reason for what is happening.)

It's the description of a fantastic natural paradise, made of golden sand, coral, wise whales and shiny nacre shells.

It's the coming-of-age novel of a kid that will find the strength to stop a conflict, to avoid it by learning new things, challenging a prejudice

(“A swimming Mada has never been seen”) for the sake of his people and of peace.

It's a delicate and poetic narration, the flight of a butterfly, which is going to be read in one breath. Supported by D'Altan's amazing illustrations, this story is actually really intense, both in the contents and in the teaching.

Last but not least, in a time filled with intolerance, conflicts and subjugation, **this is a little precious life lesson for the little ones** (perfectly understandable and enjoyable for a 5 -8 core target), **which touches even the older readers'**.

The characters

The story is populated by strong emblematic protagonists, easily recognizable by the very young readership.

Here are some examples:

The young hero Sai, who overcomes his fears and carries out his discoveries just for love; **the wise Samas**, who knows both the deepest human nature and the hidden nature of his islands; **the “evil” Bem**, who thinks power can make people happier and whose final tears witness the fact that he realizes he lost a paradise. The reader can easily identify with Sai, admire master Samas and being worried about Madas' destiny and be indignant against Bem, while swimming at the whales's side.

The setting

The protagonists are not only the human beings, but also the amazing uncontaminated nature, which becomes a “participating background” for the action.

The peculiar underwater structure of the islands will be the resolution key of the plot.

A reflecting nacre shell will warn the Madas about the invasion attempt of the Temés and the huge whales will become the deus ex machina that will frustrate Bem’s war plans, marking the inglorious end of his conquest dreams.

Nature is not only a background or a bystander, but it plays a role in the plot perfectly complementing with the events created by the humans.

On the pages of the book, words and images work together to make us hear the swash of the waves, to make the fish’s amazing colors stand out and to make the white seagulls fly against a blue sky background: An hymn to the beauty humans can’t appreciate as they should.



The themes

- The amazing beauty of nature
- The importance of respecting mutual differences
- Diversity as enrichment
- The subjugation and presumption as insanity against people and nature
- The importance of growing up by overcoming fears
- The importance of broadening your knowledge
- The ability to do new things to try something no one has ever achieved
- The kids' innovative point of view
- The nonsense of war
- A kid that can avoid the risk of a war by becoming an ante litteram peacemaker between two primitive communities, who represent all the conflicting situations

The authors

ROBERTO PIUMINI



<http://www.wuz.it/biografia/17719/Piumini-Roberto.html>

Born in 1947 under the sign of Piscis, Roberto Piumini is one of the most famous Italian childrens' writers, also popular abroad. He won a lot of literary prizes.

He holds a degree in pedagogy, he's a teacher, an actor and a TV and theatre author, puppeteer, translator of classical texts, history of costume scholar and poet, he wrote about one-hundred fairy tales, tales, novels, nursery rhymes and poems. All his book have been very successful also in Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Albania, Germany, France, Greece, Holland, Japan, Korea, China, Great Britain, South America and in the US.

PAOLO D'ALTAN



<https://www.luccacomicsandgames.com/it/2013/junior/il-concorso/paolo-d-altan/>

Classical studies and School of Applied Art of the Sforzesco Castle in Milan, D'Altan has a big artistic experience. He earned a lot of important awards, including the prestigious Andersen Prize as best illustrator in 2011. His partnership with Roberto Piumini started a long time ago and his colorful and delicate illustrations accompany the reader in a fantastic journey between reality and imagination.

The incipit of the book:

There's water, water, water, water, water, but not only water. There are five islands.

Mada, in the East, is a tableland sloping towards a sandy beach. In the West, Temé is rocky and uneven, with a bay surrounded by sea stacks. The other islands are Vu, slightly bigger than a rock, Kima, almost flat, and Uani, which is between Mada and Temé.

On Mada, twenty huts are near a wide field with wheat plantations.

Temé has a village of fifteen huts, in the center of the bay, where people fish in the sea aboard a rowboat and every ten days they reach Mada to swap their fish with some bread.

Uani, partly flat and partly rocky, hides a little valley and old Samas's cave.

The Temés never go on this island, because Samas fishes and grows wheat and they don't need anything else. When they walk past Uani, they wave at him from the boat and he lifts his hand in reply.

The Madas don't go to the seaside, because they fear it. Some of their kids sometimes ask the Temés to go to Uani, because Samas tells long amazing stories. To listen to them, the little ones face the fear of the journey aboard a boat. Vu and Kima are uninhabited.

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