

THE NOWHERE TRILOGY

找不到國小三部曲

Nominee of the 2009 Golden Tripod Award

Recommended by the Taiwan Government Information Office

A primary school teacher by profession, Tsen Peng-Wei has turned her everyday into an imaginary playground full of wonder and delight. Filled with humour and accompanied by Bei Lynn's evocative illustrations, these are stories to entertain those big and small.

The Nowhere School:

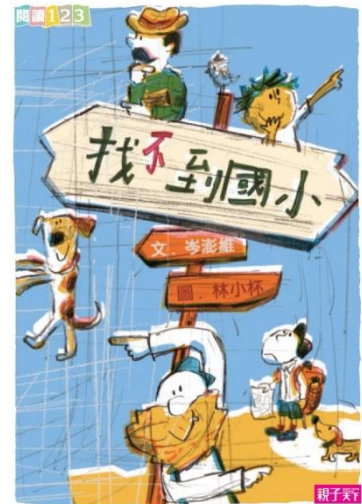
The Nowhere School sits on top of the Nowhere Mountains. Outsiders often get lost in the meandering pathways and the permanent mist, so it is rare for those who don't know where to look to find this special place. But if you ever get the chance, you will find many wonders: the Ferris wheel library, the Wood-Tub Flying Ship, the Wave Slide, not to mention the people! Mr Slowly Does It, and Mrs No Change who mans the tuck shop... Going to school has never been such fun!

The Nowhere Mountains:

High up in the Nowhere Mountains, deep in the mist and fog, is the hidden No Way In Lane. And if you're lucky enough to find your way in, you just might come across Mr Priceless Treasures who keeps secrets, or buy a pair of ice glasses from the spectacles shop which have the power to make everything clear again. Or you could go to the hundred-year-old medicine shop and buy yourself some Ba-la-ba-la-wu-jee-lee-ga herbs to give you confidence. Or, of course, you could choose to go to the Scariest Than Going Down the Mountain at Night By Yourself hairdressers run by Mrs Quick Scissors... If you've managed to survive that, then there's always the Nowhere Mountain's most delicious treat, the Rainbow Tree, dripping with the most delicious sweets you could ever hope to find!

The Nowhere Headmaster:

The Nowhere School has just got itself a new headmaster, but no one knows



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what he looks like. He's always got new ideas, like Bring Your Pet to School day. But whatever you do, don't go winning the Nowhere School Spelling Bee, because the consequences will be beyond your imagination... But most of all, the Nowhere School's new headmaster is trying to think of the best possible present to send to his pupils for Children's Day. Clearly he doesn't know what a Grapefruit Giant, a Whispering Chicken, or a Bag of Oolong Leaves are! Honestly!

Tsen Peng-Wei 岑澎維 / Author

Having graduated from National Taitung University's Graduate Institute of Children's Literature, Tsen Peng-Wei now works as a primary school teacher. Her favourite pastime is sitting on a comfortable chair and waiting for the stories to come to her, where she can catch them. While she often has to battle with her prey, she was soon addicted to the unpredictable nature of it, and now she can't live without her writing. She has won numerous awards, including the Dawushan prize for Literature twice, and the 2004 Council for Cultural Affairs' prize for children's literature. She has published novels, picture books, and essays to great acclaim.

Bei Lynn 林小杯 / Illustrator

Bei Lynn has loved drawing since she was a child. She studied art at university, concentrating on children's book illustration at graduate school. She published her first picture book, *To Be a Fish*, in 1999, and has continued to write and draw picture books ever since, including *Gus the Dinosaur Bus*, *Kata Kata Kata* etc, winning her many prizes and a special recommendation at the Taiwan Pavilion during the Bologna Book Fair.

THE NOWHERE SCHOOL

Text by Tsen Peng-Wei, illustrated by Bei Lynn. Translated by Helen Wang.

Chapter I: The Nowhere School—is there really such a place?

Yes, there really is a place called the Nowhere School, and it's in the Nowhere Mountains, which are covered all year round in mist and cloud.

To get there, you have to follow the twisting, turning mountain roads and find a way through the thick, white cloud. When you come to the secret village with the red-tiled rooftops, look up, and you'll see a heavy wooden gate. That's the entrance to the Nowhere School.

People hear about the Nowhere School and come looking for it. But it's not easy to find. That's not because the sign on the gate is so old and faded that you can't read it any more. And it's not because it's a small school with only a few students. And it's certainly not because it's not marked clearly on the map or because the signposts have blown over in the wind.

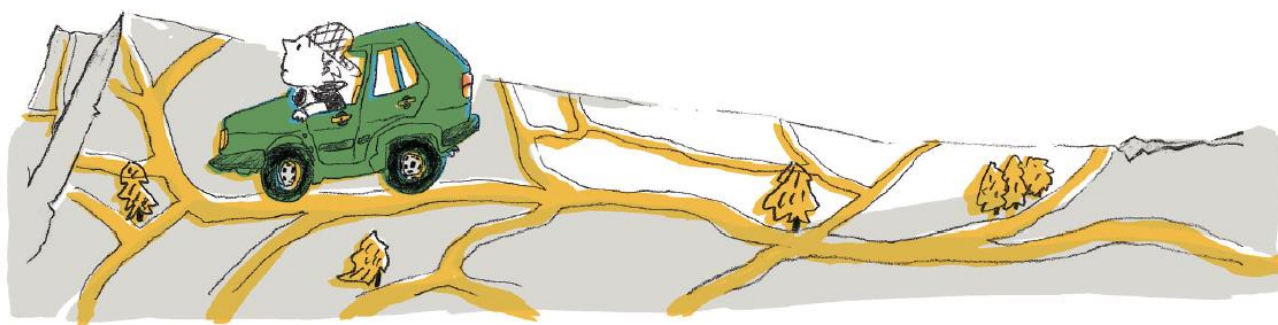
The reason why it's so difficult to find the Nowhere School is because it's easy to get lost on the way, to go down the wrong track. The little road to the school is a bit like a snake—as soon as it sees a human being it makes itself scarce, disappearing without a trace. In fact, it's quite an achievement even finding the Nowhere Mountains. And although there are a dozen mountain roads that all look exactly the same, only one of them will lead you to the Nowhere School.

Most people are excited to find their first road, and are convinced it's the right one. But that road leads to the Know-where School, which is so much easier to find. Of course, the Know-where School has a lot of visitors, most of whom are delighted, thinking they have found the Nowhere School.

To get to the Nowhere School, you have to go to the foot of the Nowhere Mountains, and head south on the road that runs due north, turn left at the sixth turning on the right, and then take the first turning on the left.

Then take the following turnings in sequence: left left right right, right left left; then right right left left, left right right.

'That sounds easy enough!'



The problem is that, as the cloud thickens, more often than not people miss the turnings. Everything seems to be lost in the mist, and even the school bell seems to clang heavily: ‘Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!’

People hear the bell and think they must be near the Nowhere School. But they are still a long way away. The mountain paths twist and turn, and run all over the Nowhere Mountains. Those who are in a hurry to get to the Nowhere School rarely find it. But those who are not in a hurry often come across it by chance.

Is it called the Nowhere School because people can’t find it? Or was it called the Nowhere School so that people wouldn’t be able to find it? No one knows the answer, because the old records are nowhere to be found.

The local people have no trouble finding the Nowhere School. They can find it with their eyes closed! The name of the school annoys them. For them the school is right there, and it’s a nuisance always having to write that unnecessary seven-letter word.

But, it’s not so irritating that they want to change it. Deep down, they rather like its unusual name. After all, the Nowhere School does have an air of mystery about it, and, some might say, a certain magnificence.

There is only one way to get to the Nowhere School, and that is to go there slowly and not to rush. Learn the turnings sequence by heart, and then, when you’re in the mist and the cloud, slow down and take pleasure in the lush pines and old trees by the side of the road. Sooner or later you’ll find yourself at the tiny little school.

Many people come to The Nowhere Mountains specifically to see the school. They want to know what’s so special about it. And why people are so intrigued by it. But only the people who have been to the Nowhere School can tell you that.

Only a few people have ever been to the Nowhere School. And when they leave again, they all miss this unique place. They hold it dear in their hearts, and long to go and see it again.

But the cloud is so thick, and the path so difficult to find... that most people have to be content with hearing tales about this beautiful and extraordinary place.

2: Adam’s journey to the Nowhere School

As the new day dawns in the Nowhere Mountains, Adam, who’s eleven, and a fifth-grader at the Nowhere School, is getting ready for school.

The sun knows where Adam is going, and gently wakes the still-sleepy sunbeams, so they can light up the path for him. But the cloud is too thick for the sun to llluminate sky in this way.

Adam slings his schoolbag onto his back, and sets off for the little river on his way to school.

‘Adam! Wait for me!’ Adam doesn’t need to look around. He knows it’s Kevin.

Kevin catches up with him, and together they walk along the river. The water gushes from the source at the top of the Nowhere Mountains, then streams downhill to where it flows beside them.

There is a quicker way to get to school, but Adam likes to come this way and catch a ride in Uncle Joe’s boat.

He knocks on Uncle Joe’s door, and an old man with a long beard answers immediately, pops his cap on his head, and says:

‘Let’s go!’

Uncle Joe slides his Wood-Tub Flying Ship into the water. It will take the boys to school. The river flows this way and that. It takes longer than walking but is much more convenient when you have things to carry.

‘No standing up!’ says Uncle Joe as he unties the mooring rope. He says this every time.

Adam knows this, because the reason he rises with the sun every morning is to catch a ride in Uncle Joe’s Wood-Tub Flying Ship.

Uncle Joe made the Wood-Tub Flying Ship with his own hands, fastening the heavy pieces of wood together to create the big, round wooden tub. It’s big enough to take a bath in, but Uncle Joe won’t have anyone calling it a bathtub!

Uncle Joe fixed three big, fat tyres full of air around the outside of the tub, so that when the Wood-Tub Flying Ship bumps against the rocks it bounces off them and spins leisurely around.

‘Like a spinning top.’

Adam loves the sensation of spinning round and round in the Wood-Tub Flying Ship on the water.

‘It’s like we’re aliens in a flying saucer,’ says Kevin, reaching out his hand to catch the drops of water that keep splashing them.

‘Make sure you pay attention in class, Adam,’ says Uncle Joe, drawing the paddle through the water.

Adam isn’t listening. He’s only interested in how much water is splashing into the boat. ‘It’s not so much fun today, Uncle Joe. I wish the stream was a bit fuller and the current a bit stronger.’

‘The water’s perfect today. Too much water and it’s dangerous. Work hard at school and then one day you can be the head of the village.’ Uncle Joe carries on saying these things, and Adam carries on ignoring them.

The most exciting part of the ride is when the Wood-Tub Flying Ship comes to the steps. There’s a natural slope that the river has to go down, and once, when the river was dry, Uncle Joe built a series of wide steps, so the little boat might descend more gently, one step at a time.



On each step the water catches the boat, carries it along, and then drops it over the edge... and every time the boat goes over the edge to the next step, the two boys scream ‘Arrggh!’

After six screams, there is a bend in the river, and three more classmates jump into the boat.

It’s better with more people. The Wooden Tub Flying Ship goes racing down the river.

‘Faster, Uncle Joe! Faster!’

‘You’re scaring all the squirrels away,’ says Uncle Joe, shaking his head at them.

They pass through a forest of pine trees and the little boat comes to a mooring place. Uncle Joe ties the rope around a tree on the bank, pulls on it and brings the boat to shore. Two more classmates jump in. Now there are seven of them, all shouting and hollering for the Wood-Tub Flying Ship to take them to school.

It's at this point that the sky begins to brighten.

'It's ages until school starts!' Adam cries in delight.

'Uncle Joe, can we do it again?!' the children clamour.

'Only if you walk back up to the top of the hill!' says Uncle Joe. He can't possibly take all seven of them back the way they came.

'No problem!' They put their schoolbags on their backs, jump out of the boat and run back.

'We got here before you did!' they shout when Uncle Joe arrives, drenched in sweat, at the place where he first picked up Adam.

By now, the sky is already light and the seven children are ready to go. They know that wonderful Uncle Joe will take them all the way to school.

'Be careful. Don't get your clothes wet!' Uncle Joe reminds them.

'But that's no fun!' they cry.

And that's how Adam sets out for school, when a new day dawns in the Nowhere Mountains. And that's why he likes to walk by the stream, even when he knows it takes a little bit longer that way. He also knows that by leaving a little bit earlier in the morning, he won't be late. And that if they all leave a little bit earlier, Uncle Joe will let them have two rides—two exciting rides—in the Wood-Tub Flying Ship.

'No more than seven,' is Uncle Joe's rule, which means there's always someone ready and waiting to take a place in his Wood-Tub Flying Ship when one of them is away.

Indeed, Uncle Joe's Wood-Tub Flying Ship is always full, seven days a week.

3: A school with a Ferris wheel?

A group of younger students appear out of nowhere on the path in the Nowhere Mountains. 'Race you to school!' they shout, and run off, each one eager to get there first.

'You'd better hurry or you'll be late!' says Adam, jumping out of Uncle Joe's Wood-Tub Flying Ship, and running to overtake the younger students.

The younger ones are out of breath by the time they reach the gates.

'Oh no, we're last again,' they can't help sighing in disappointment.

At ten past seven, the bell rings and the old wooden gates of the Nowhere School open. Creaking and squeaking, they clear a way through the clouds.

That's right! The big wooden doors that people are so impatient to see inside ... when they open, and the clouds part, then you can catch your first glimpse of the Nowhere School.

If you follow Adam through the gates and into the school grounds, you'll see an enormous Ferris wheel in the distance. It's so big you can't miss it. It catches your attention and draws you in. No matter how thick the white clouds are they cannot conceal it.

The Ferris wheel is made of the hardest wood from the Nowhere Mountains, and attached to it are thirty-two hanging tubs, each with its own roof and open air windows.

When the series of different-sized cogwheels are set in motion, the Nowhere School Ferris wheel creaks to life and slowly starts to move.

Adam meets Linus at the top of the steps. They are both going to the library.

‘Which book will you read today?’ asks Adam.

‘The one I didn’t finish yesterday. It’s brilliant,’ Linus replies.

‘What’s it called?’

Linus looks embarrassed. Eventually, he admits that he can’t remember, ‘But it’s all about our Nowhere Mountains!’

They reach the enormous Ferris wheel, which is in fact ... the Nowhere School library!

Adam arrives so early at school every day because he wants to ride on the Ferris wheel library.

In the morning before the school flag is raised, during lunch break and other times when not in class, and even once school has finished for the day, the Ferris wheel lurches into action, and that means that the library is open.

Any child who wants to read can go to the library. Whatever takes your interest—astronomy, geography, entomology, botany, literature—if you can imagine the book, you can find it in the Ferris wheel.

Linus follows Adam into the moving library. They choose a pod they like, climb in and sit down. They close the wooden door, and the Ferris wheel lifts Adam and Linus gently up to the sky.

‘Most people are only interested in looking out at the world on their first ride in the library,’ says Adam.

‘If they knew how wonderful the books are inside, they wouldn’t look out of the window ever again.’ Linus finds the same book he was reading the day before.

‘Here it is! *Here in the Nowhere Mountains*. He opens up the book and carries on reading from where he left off.

The books in this pod are Adam’s favourites.

As the ferris wheel turns and slowly rises higher, the Nowhere School is laid out below in its entirety.

The Nowhere School also has a Wave Slide, which is a combination of a slide and a wall. It rises and falls like the waves on the sea, marking the boundary of the Nowhere School.

The middle grade students get to school early in order to have a few goes down the Wave Slide. The senior students like to have a go too. They think it’s a bit childish for them, but it brings back happy memories of when they first started school.

The Wave Slide has six lanes, like a motorway. The younger students often choose to slide down the one closest to their classroom.

There aren’t many classrooms in the Nowhere School, and all of them are single storey, a bit old and shabby perhaps, but warm and cosy. The sports area on the eastern side of the school is quite small too, and looks like a little dog enjoying a lazy stretch in the sun.

Next to the sports area is a very long staircase that climbs up the mountain like a huge centipede. This Stairway to Heaven has exactly one hundred steps, and this is where the youngest students learn to count to a hundred.

As the Ferris wheel turns, the pods rise higher until the Nowhere School grounds are out of focus, and seem to

be filled with candy floss. Adam turns his attention to the book in his hands.

There's a bell in the Ferris wheel, and it rings to tell the boys to go back to their classroom.

'I wish I could stay and read a bit more... ' Adam thinks, reluctantly putting down his book.

'I don't want to go.' Linus has read his book several times already. He could read it a hundred times and still find something new in it.

'It's so comfortable in the library,' think the two boys as their pod comes to the landing stage, and they get out.

By the time they glance back, the Ferris wheel has already stopped.

'We must get here earlier tomorrow!' they say as they walk back to the classroom.