

Norah DeWolfe

Kayleigh Shield

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The Wump World: A World For None, A Book For All

The term “children’s book” can be misleading as it implies that books in this genre are only meant for younger readers who are not yet able to comprehend more complex works. However, Bill Peet, an accomplished American illustrator and author, demonstrates the versatility of this genre in its ability to transmit important messages to all readers. In his 1970 book, *The Wump World*, Peet delivers a thought-provoking look into the modern and historical issues that have plagued our world, rendering it a must read for all Canadians. The story follows the Wumps, the native inhabitants of an idyllic green planet which is exploited by the alien Pollutians, until they are left with nothing more than a singular grassy meadow. The plot addresses the cruel spirit of colonizers, showcases the many flaws of consumerism, and rings alarm bells for the death of the Wump World as well as our own.

To begin, Peet showcases the Pollutians’ colonialist spirit and the Wumps’ reaction to it, inviting readers to draw parallels between the Wump World and the real world while sympathizing with the exploited groups in each realm. For example, when the Pollutians arrive on the Wump World, the “World Chief” takes action uncannily resembling those taken by historical colonizers such as Hernan Cortez, Christopher Columbus, and Jacques Cartier; he plants a flag and declares the land his own (Peet 9). The words and the illustrations describing this action show readers the shallowness of the Pollutians and encourages empathy with the Wumps. Moreover, once the Pollutians have left to colonize a new planet, the Wumps “[wonder]

if there [is] anything left for them, [...] for all they [can] see their world [is] completely ruined.”

(39) On the one hand, The Wumps’ bewilderment and desperation invoke sentiments of sadness and frustration, leading younger readers who have attachments to their own homes and communities to imagine what it would be like for them to be ruined. On the other hand, more mature readers can think of historical instances of colonization, such as that of Haiti, whose people and lands were exploited by Europeans, leaving lasting social and economic harms. Alternatively, readers can reflect on Canada, which continually fails to reconcile with its own colonial past. Altogether, the colonialist traits of the Pollutians, and their impact on the native Wumps are acute, allowing readers to empathize and analyse, while drawing parallels with our own world.

To continue, throughout *The Wump World*, Bill Peet critiques consumerism and presents its consequences, allowing readers to reflect on their own habits and societies. Indeed, once the Pollutians settle onto Wump World, “there [is] more and more noise and more of everything. More buildings, more smokestacks puffing more and more smoke. More freeways with more traffic shooting out more clouds of exhaust. More trash and more trash piles, with more and more waste gushing into the rivers and lakes.” (25) Here, Peet's repetition of the term “more” puts emphasis on both the Pollutians’ and humanity’s consumerist habits in a poignant way, while emphasizing the negative changes to *The Wump World*. Peet's nightmare of an economy where fast fashion and constant consumption are heavily endorsed has become reality, proving the literary worth and current relevance of his book. Furthermore, through the Pollutian World Chief’s insistence that they must find a new, better, world, after having already relocated once, Peet emphasizes the human desire for newness and the tendency to ignore alternative solutions (30). Peet’s foreshadowing is apparent once again, as, today, the richest humans of our world

have begun to explore space travel and the colonization of new planets while actively contributing to the destruction of Earth. Overall, Peet succeeds in tackling the problems associated with consumerism with a narrative that allows all readers to understand and reflect.

Finally, *The Wump World* addresses the natural and social consequences of environmental destruction through industrialisation, raising awareness for an issue that is ever relevant in the 21st century. In fact, Peet describes that following the Pollutians' industrialisation, "the streets were so clouded by the factory smoke and the fumes from the freeways the Pollutians could barely breathe." (26) Today, these words could be found in newspaper articles describing our own climate crisis, highlighting *The Wump World's* educational merit. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the words and illustrations at the beginning of the story, for example "crystal clear rivers" and "tall tender grass" and the words used in the former quote serve to further demonstrate the devastating transformation that the Wump World is subjected to. Furthermore, Peet underlines the social and health repercussions of environmental degradation, noting that the Pollutians "went sneezing and wheezing about the streets crouching and grumbling and blaming one another for the awful mess they were in." (27) The rhetoric detailing the Pollutians' interactions with each other underscores that environmental instability brings about the worst in humans. In doing so, it invites older readers to reflect on current tensions around environmental issues such as conflicts between governments, environmental activists, oil and gas producers, and cattle farmers. All in all, *The Wump World* offers an allegorical look into the consequences of environmental degradation, encouraging readers' reflection on the topic, and inviting them to save our natural world.

In conclusion, Bill Peet's 1970 book, *The Wump World*, unpacks important historical and present-day issues, making it a book that should be read by all Canadians. Indeed, Peet addresses

the baseness of colonialism, the flaws of consumerism, and the consequences of environmental degradation. Peet demonstrates that children's books can propagate important messages, and in a time where many feel as though adults have failed to address climate change, it is ever more important to ensure that children are passionate about the issue. To achieve this, youth need to read more nature-centric literature so that they have a deeper attachment to their natural world. As children read more about this issue, they may just be able to convince their parents of its worth too. *The Wump World* is the perfect place to start.

Works Cited

Peet, Bill. *The Wump World*. New York, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1970.