

# THE SUMMER I ROBBED A BANK

David O'Doherty

Illustrated by Chris Judge

Puffin Children's Books

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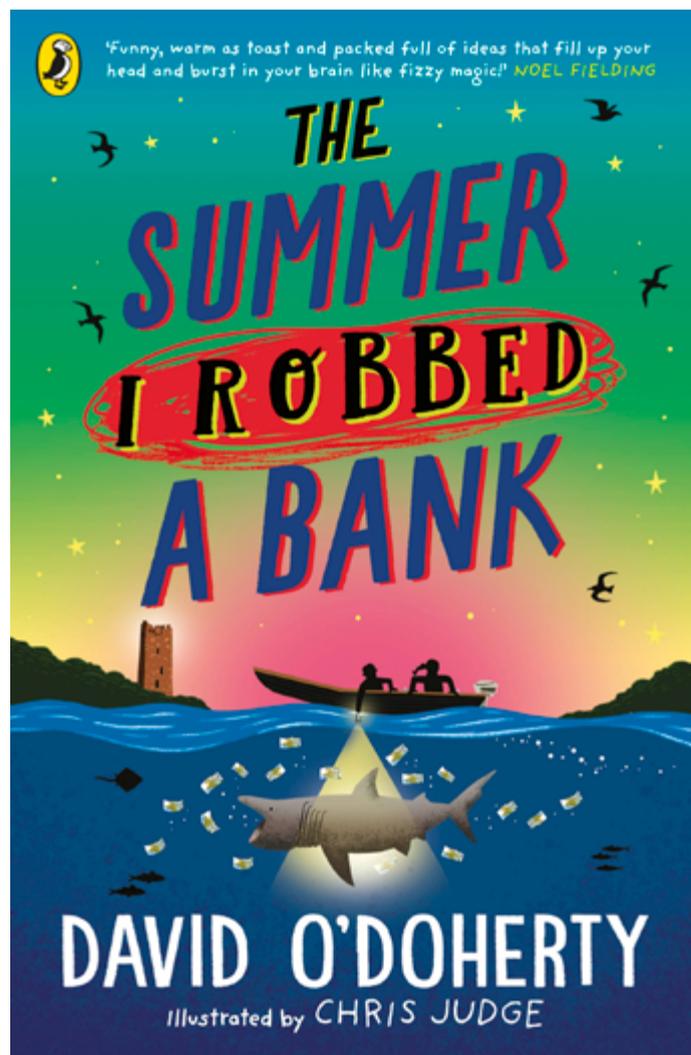
## Themes

- Resilience
- Friendship
- Family break-up
- Cancer
- Coming of age
- Island living

**Summary** Twelve-year-old Rex, the anti-hero of this funny adventure story, finds himself on Achill Island for a few weeks in the summer. His parents have separated and his mother is in hospital with a broken leg so he is in the care of his eccentric (and terminally ill) Uncle Derm. Here he meets a thoroughly good-natured girl, Kitty, and her hapless father, Ronan. Money is needed to save the local assisted-living centre, and chaotic and hare-brained schemes lead to lots of hilarity and self-discovery as the plot unfolds. A fast-paced, engaging book with a heart of gold.

**Judges' Comments** Following his parents' separation, Rex isn't impressed when he is sent to a remote Irish island for his summer holidays. That is until he is roped into helping his strange and brilliant Uncle Derm in a crazy plan (inspired by tales of pirate queen Grace O'Malley) to rob the island's mobile bank and redistribute the money. This fresh and original narrative from Doherty – supported with illustrations by Judge – is a funny and subversive tale filled with poignancy and beauty that captures the magic of one momentous summer.

**About the Author** David O'Doherty is an award-winning stand-up comedian, writer and regular guest on television shows such as *8 out of 10 Cats Does Countdown* and *Would I Lie to You?* He has written two theatre shows for children, including one where he fixes their bicycles on stage. His *Danger Is Everywhere* series has been hugely successful. David's granny lived on Achill Island, the setting for this book.



**About the Illustrator** Chris Judge is an award-winning illustrator, writer and artist based in Dublin. He is the author of three picturebooks based on his *Lonely Beast* character. He has worked with David O'Doherty on the bestselling *Danger Is Everywhere* series. He has also illustrated books by Roddy Doyle, Eoin Colfer and Ryan Tubridy. He has designed many large outdoor mosaics for schools and colleges around Ireland. He has also designed the Dublin Story Bird, a marvellous two-and-a-half-metre-high 3D bird.

## QUESTIONS

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Does the title make you want to read the book?
2. Look at the front-cover illustration and say whether you think the robbery was a success?
3. Are there any clues as to where the book might be set?
4. Read the comments on the inside front cover. Do you like that some reviews are from famous people and publications and some are from young people?
5. Read the blurb on the back cover and list as many facts as you have evidence for about Rex, the narrator.
6. On the inside back cover we learn that David O'Doherty is a stand-up comedian. Does that make him a funnier writer?

### AS YOU READ

#### Chapters 1–8 (pages 1–55)

1. People often make jokes about Rex's name. Is this teasing or bullying?
2. When Uncle Derm is babysitting, how does he bring Rex out of his 'shutdown'?
3. In chapter 4 there are three pieces of bad news. What are they?
4. What do you think about Rex's relationship with his mother?
5. Describe Uncle Derm's house on Achill.
6. Why does Rex lock himself in Derm's van?
7. Look at the single illustration at the beginning of each chapter and say how each one relates to that chapter.

#### Chapters 9–16 (pages 57–121)

1. Sarcasm is when people say the opposite of what is true to make someone else look or feel foolish. This is sometimes done in fun. What sarcastic comment does Rex make about Derm's boat?
2. What does Derm do to prevent the building inspector visiting the island?
3. What do Rex and Kitty have in common? How does each one deal with it?
4. Why does Rex decide to return to Dublin? How far does he get?

#### Chapters 17–24 (pages 123–178)

1. List all the fundraising activities organised to raise money.
2. If you were a visiting Health and Safety Officer, what problems might you have with these activities?
3. Which one sounds the most fun?
4. They raise about €2,000 – why then do they need to rob the mobile bank?
5. Is the robbery well planned and does it work out as expected?
6. 'A strong initial plan and then no detail': who says this and what are they talking about?
7. What does Rex learn from Kitty about coping with divorce?

#### Chapters 25–31 (pages 179–224)

1. Why can't they get at the money?
2. Who says 'you have to stop overthinking everything'? About whom is it said? Do you agree?
3. What does Derm mean when he says, 'Manulla makes this place look like downtown Tokyo'? Why are they going to Manulla? Why does the plan change?

#### Chapters 32–42 (pages 225–284)

1. What is the plan to get the bank van to Inishbiggle?
2. When it ends up in the sea, what is the plan to retrieve it?
3. How do they eventually get at the money?
4. How do you feel about the way the book ends?

### AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Did you enjoy the book? Why?
2. How did Rex change during his holiday in Achill?
3. Who had the most influence on him?
4. What skills did Rex bring to the planned robbery?
5. At what point did you realise Derm was ill?
6. What emotions did you feel while reading this book?
7. Is the plot realistic?
8. Who was your favourite character?
9. Does this book remind you of any other book or film? What book or film is it?

## ACTIVITIES

- On a map of Ireland, plot Rex's journey to Achill.
- Go to [www.achilltourism.com](http://www.achilltourism.com). Scroll down and watch the short video (two and a half minutes) entitled 'Visit Achill in 2020'.
- Invent a back story for Rex's mother, explaining why she was so protective of Rex and why she was so afraid of him going swimming.
- Arrange a class debate with the topic 'Living on an island is better than living on the mainland'. Write a speech either for or against. Use details from the story and the video above to support your point of view.
- There are lots of references to Grace O'Malley, the pirate queen, in this book. She is also known as Gráinne Mhaol and she was a real woman who lived in the west of Ireland about 500 years ago. Find out all you can about her.
- Derm was trying to prevent the closing down of the assisted-living centre. Who might have lived there? Is there a similar building in your community? Find out all you can about it.
- Suggest ideas for a fundraiser for your school. You can decide whether you want to go for madcap ideas that would never get past the principal or ideas you could really do. Work in groups and each group can pitch their idea to the class.
- The traditional boat in the west of Ireland is a currach, and in this story four currachs were lashed together to transport the van. This type of boat has a wooden frame with canvas stretched over it. The famous Irish artist Paul Henry has a painting called *Launching the Currach*. Look at this online and then look at more of Paul Henry's paintings of the west of Ireland.
- The illustrator of the book is Chris Judge. Look back at all of the illustrations and suggest how Chris decided to tackle the task of illustrating this book – what to draw, where to place it in the story, what technique to use. Do you think he read the book or that the author or publisher told him what to draw? The writer, David O'Doherty, is a successful comedian. Are Chris Judge's illustrations funny?
- Allocate one or two of the forty-two illustrations to each person in the class. Using A4 sheets (landscape) copy the illustrations and the numbers under them. Display in order on a wall or in book format. Design a new cover. Then retell the story from the illustrations
- Go to [www.chrisjudge.com](http://www.chrisjudge.com) and look at all the art work and installations on the site. On YouTube, find 'Doodle Squares with Chris Judge' and draw along.

- At the end of the book there is an extract from *Danger Is Everywhere*, also by O'Doherty and Judge. Read it and discuss what, if anything, made you smile or laugh. Compile a class list of funny books you have read and would recommend. Don't forget picturebooks.
- Write advice to writers and illustrators: 'I find a book is funny if ...'
- Compile a class list of everyone's advice.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Check out these Children's Books Ireland reading lists:
  - Adventure Stories <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/adventure-stories>
  - Celebrating Families <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/celebrating-families>
  - Difficult Changes <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/difficult-changes>
  - Overcoming Fears <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/overcoming-fears>
  - Grief <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/grief>
- Go here to read an extract from *The Summer I Robbed a Bank* <https://www.puffinschools.co.uk/resources/first-chapter-extract-the-summer-i-robbed-a-bank-by-david-odoherty/>