

Did You Shake Your Tail Feathers?

by Sharlene Helg Ngatupuna
illustrated by Bruce Mahalski

Overview

In this lively, fable-like narrative, Weka has found a feather that she is determined to return to its owner. She meets a number of birds who all want the feather, and some are quite determined to get it. There is an audio version of the text on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2010*.

Before reading, you may wish to do some research as a class into the New Zealand birds featured in the text, focusing on their physical characteristics and personalities. Alternatively, this could be a great follow-up to the reading.

Suggested purposes

This book supports the comprehension strategies of forming and testing hypotheses, inferring, and analysing and synthesising. It provides opportunities for building vocabulary and supports fluent, expressive reading. It can also be used as a model for writing and has strong links to science.

Text features

(This information is intended as a prompt for teachers rather than a list of teaching points.)

- the strong New Zealand context, featuring the characters Weka, Pūkeko, Kiwi, Kāhu (harrier hawk), and Kārearea (New Zealand falcon)
- the clear narrative structure
- the gradual build-up of suspense and danger, which requires inference on the part of the reader
- the implied messages or moral about courage, determination, and doing the right thing
- the strong characterisation of Weka, including her curiosity and her determination to find the rightful owner
- the detailed illustrations that convey (in a painterly style) the characteristics of the birds and the New Zealand bush
- the ellipsis at the end to suggest the possibility of another adventure to come
- the descriptive language, for example:
 - the adjectives “bravest”, “fearless”, “fearsome”, “impressive”, “nosy” (to describe their personalities) and “beautiful, shiny, black”, “brown with dark stripes”, “glossy and black” (to describe their feathers)
 - the adverbs “firmly”, “gently”, “nervously”, “timidly”
 - the descriptive verbs “demanded”, “flapped”, “shook”, “snapped”, “squabbled”, “squawked”, “swooped”
 - the phrase “poke about among”
 - the use of onomatopoeia – “Kaaa!”, “Screee!”, “Squawk!”
- the idiomatic phrases – “out of the corner of her eye”, “as fast as his legs could carry him”
- the use of macrons in the Māori words to denote long vowel sounds
- the use of commas to support phrasing
- the suffix “less” in “fearless”.

Introducing the text

Note that you could listen to the audio version of this text yourself before using the text with children so you can, if necessary, provide them with a model for the pronunciation of the Māori words.

Tell the children you have a book for them to read, set in New Zealand, which is similar to a fable. Make connections to any fables the children may be familiar with. Discuss the characteristics of fables, including talking animals and a moral or message for the reader.

Discuss the cover. Draw on any knowledge the children have about New Zealand birds.

Otherwise, establish that they can find out what these birds are when they read the text. *I'm wondering why the author chose this title.* Encourage the children to share their thoughts. Set the initial purpose for the reading – to find out the reason for the title. You could draw attention to the fact that the title is a question and discuss why that might be.

During the reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page – The children may recognise the feather from the cover illustration. *I wonder which bird the feather belongs to ...*

Pages 2 and 3 – Remind the children of the initial purpose for the reading and have them read these pages silently. If necessary, clarify the meanings of “upset” (by providing synonyms they may be more familiar with, such as “sad” or “unhappy”) and the preposition “among”. Discuss the link to the title and have the children draw on their knowledge of narratives to predict that there are likely to be a number of characters and incidents along the way, leading to some sort of resolution.

Share the purpose for the reading – *As you read, I want you to be looking for clues that tell you about the personalities of the characters.* Start a chart with three headings, for example, Character’s name, Character’s words or actions, and Our inferences about this character. Begin by asking the children to focus on Weka, recording their ideas on the chart. *What have we learned about this bird?* Have them identify clues, for example, “nosy”, “poke about”. (If some children say “noisy” for “nosy”, have them cross-check. Both words make sense, but only one conveys the author’s intention, so this is a good opportunity to demonstrate the importance of attending to visual information.) *Why does Weka want to return the feather? What does this suggest about her?* Draw out the idea that she seems helpful and kind.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties.

Pages 4 and 5 – You may need to tell the children “harrier hawk”. If necessary, discuss the meaning of “timidly”. The children should notice that is the first time the title phrase has been used in the text. *What can we infer about Kāhu? Does he feel the same way about returning the feather as Weka? Focus on the imperative phrase “Let me have it ...”. Why is Kāhu following Weka?* Establish that Kāhu covets the feather. Update the chart with the ideas (about both characters) from the discussion. Recap what has happened so far and have the children review their predictions about the narrative structure.

Pages 6 and 7 – If necessary, guide the children with the pronunciation of “Pūkeko”. Check their understanding of “swamp hen”, “glossy”, and “bill”. Add information about Pūkeko to the chart. *How is this similar to when Weka talked to Kāhu?* Draw out the idea there is a pattern emerging. Have the children share their predictions about what will happen next. You may also want to draw attention to Kāhu perched in the tree.

Page 8 – If necessary, explain what a burrow is. Discuss the idea that kiwi leave signs to mark their burrows. *Why did Kiwi snap at Weka?* Clarify that kiwi don’t really have tail feathers, so perhaps Kiwi thought Weka should know this and shouldn’t have woken Kiwi up. Update the chart. Have the

children study the illustration on this page and use the clues (that Pūkeko and Kāhu are still in pursuit) to predict what will happen next.

Page 9 – You may need to explain (for example, if you have ESOL children who may be unfamiliar with this phrase), that “Just as” means that the events are happening at the same time. The children should be able to decode all of the interest words on this page, but you may need to reassure them about the bird noises. *Why do you think Kāhu swooped down from the branches above? I’m thinking this was a good thing for Weka.* Draw out the idea that Weka can use this opportunity to escape the threatening birds.

Page 10 – *What has Weka bumped into? Why have Kāhu and Pūkeko stopped?* Encourage the children to search the illustrations for clues. Prompt them to infer that it must be a bird (there are claws on the stump) and that they are all afraid because “None of them made a sound”.

Page 11 – Guide the children with how to pronounce “Kārearea”. You could support them with the decoding of “fearless” and “fearsome” by writing them on the whiteboard as separate words. *What clues can we find that might help us to understand what these words mean?* The children could draw on their knowledge of the suffix “less” to infer that “fearless” means having no fear, and so “fearsome” means making others afraid. There are many clues in the text and illustrations on pages 10 and 11 to support this.

Add information about Kārearea (and Weka) to the chart. *Thinking about the events that have taken place so far, what do you think Kārearea will say? What do you want him to say?* Have the children think, pair, and share their ideas.

Pages 12 and 13 – *Is this what you expected? Why do you think Weka is still nervous?* Note the use of close-up illustrations to emphasise Weka’s bravery in approaching the fearsome falcon.

Pages 14 and 15 – If necessary, show the children how they can decode “im-pres-sive” by dividing it into chunks. *What does this page tell us about Kārearea?* Explain that when Pūkeko ran “as fast as his legs could carry him”, he was trying to get away as fast as possible.

Pages 14 and 15 – If necessary, show the children how they can decode “im-pres-sive” by dividing it into chunks. *What does this page tell us about Kārearea?* Explain that when Pūkeko ran “as fast as his legs could carry him”, he was trying to get away as fast as possible.

Page 16 – Prompt the children to make the connection between the beginning of the story and the end. If necessary, have them return to the first page. *Why has the author used an ellipsis here?* Revisit page 14 and have the students share their ideas about what the message of the story might be, for example, that one good turn deserves another.

Refer to the chart and discuss the characterisation of the birds in more detail. Draw out the idea that there are “goodies” and “baddies”. *How did you feel when Weka was in front of Kārearea? What were you hoping would happen?* Draw out the idea that characterisation is an important way that authors can engage readers, affect their responses, and create drama and impact.

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text aloud with a partner, observing their fluency and expression and the strategies they use to manage the challenges in the text.

Return to the chart and explore the way the writer has portrayed the characters. You could discuss the types of language that give the reader more information, such as:

- the vivid verbs and adjectives;
- the range of adverbs that help the reader to know how something was done, for example, “gently”, “firmly”, “timidly”;
- the formal way that Kārearea speaks, in keeping with his majestic character, for example, “I do believe ...”.

Study the illustrations. Discuss their style, including how they add to the characterisation and give the reader clues about the birds. You could look at the determined expression on Weka’s face as she runs through the forest, the sleepy, irritated look on Kiwi’s face, and the display of feathers on page 14.

Explore the narrative structure. Identify the introduction, the problem (the feather), the complication (the pursuit of Weka), and the satisfying ending (the return of the feather and the safe passage for Weka).

Discuss the suffix “less” as meaning “not having any”. Create a chart of other examples the children may be familiar with, for example, “heartless”, “helpless”, “pointless”.

Suggestions for further tasks

Have the children listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2010* and read along (silently) with the book.

Perform the text as Readers’, Theatre. Encourage the children to read with expression to convey their characters’ personalities.

Create thought bubbles for Pūkeko and Kāhu when they are pursuing Weka. Alternatively, you could create thought bubbles for all of the characters on page 9.

Research other New Zealand birds. Ask the children to select a bird to develop as a character, as the author has done in this text. Have them write phrases or words that describe the bird’s personality, then share with the group their thoughts about the personality of their bird, explaining what they think would have happened if their bird had met Weka with the feather.

In a shared writing session, you could create another adventure for Weka using some of the language features from this text.

Reread the Ready to Read non-fiction texts *Pukeko Morning* (Blue) or *The Shag Goes Fishing* (Blue) or *Wibble Wobble, Albatross!* (Green) about other New Zealand birds.

Read other fables or moral tales, for example, the Ready to Read books *The Ant and the Grasshoppers* (Green) and *The Lion and the Mouse* (Purple) or “Little Donkey” and “The Spider Who Wanted Spots” in *Junior Journal 25* or “Two Trees” in *Junior Journal 27*.