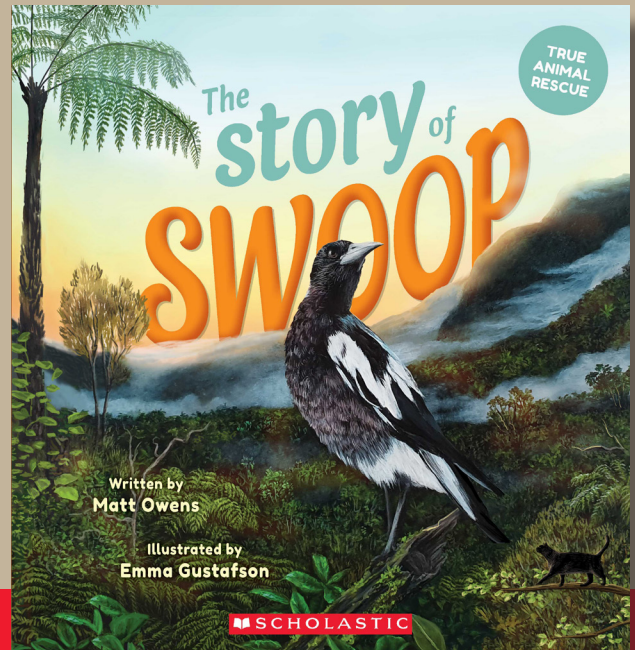


The Story of Swoop

By Matt Owens

Illustrated by Emma Gustafson



• Reading • Writing • Social Studies • Art • Science

Synopsis

One day, an injured baby magpie, as yet too young to fly, was rescued from the side of the road by volunteer firefighter Matt Owens. He named the magpie 'Swoop' and took it home to care for it. Surprisingly, Matt's black cat, Mogli, and Swoop formed a close relationship, walking, eating and napping together.

As Swoop grows older, she starts to wonder what kind of animal she is. Might she be a human like Matt, a cat like Mogli, or a bird like the ones she sees in the trees? A conversation with a kingfisher confirms that Swoop is in fact a bird. With this new knowledge, she embarks on a journey to find a family of birds that look like her. She flies around the countryside and spots some birds with white and black feathers. Too shy to talk to them, Swoop returns to Matt and Mogli, but lays awake that night thinking about the magpie family.

Next day, Swoop visits the magpies and realises that she has found her family. She decides to stay with them. Swoop feels sad to be leaving Mogli and Matt, but sometimes returns to visit them.

About the Author

Matt Owens lives with his cat Mogli on the Awhitu Peninsula in the Manukau Harbour, Auckland. A volunteer firefighter, Matt is trained to rescue, but he never expected to be rescuing birds. This bird whisperer has now rescued three vulnerable magpies, Swoop and Niwa, and a pair of muscovy ducks have also joined his tribe. Matt believes his feathered friends are an example of the universe sharing its magic with him. Already an internet sensation, Matt decided to write about Swoop and Mogli's story of friendship after seeing a portrait of Swoop and realising that she had already chosen her own illustrator.

About the Illustrator

Emma Gustafson is a young painter and children's book illustrator. She lives with her mum, who is also a painter, in Whitianga in the Coromandel. In 2020, Emma completed a Bachelor of Visual Communication Design with first class honours. She uses her art to celebrate nature and document experiences. Her relationship with Swoop is personal. Emma met Swoop in the summer of 2020 while staying at Hudson's Beach on the Awhitu Peninsula, an area once owned by her great-grandfather, William Hudson. Spending three days with Swoop, Emma decided to paint her new, inquisitive friend. Matt Owens saw Emma's portrait of Swoop on social media and got in touch. *The Story of Swoop* is Emma's first published book. She is now working on her second book.

Writing Style

The Story of Swoop retells the real life rescue of an injured magpie chick by the author, volunteer firefighter Matt Owens. Matt is worried about how his cat, Mogli, will respond to having a baby bird join the family, but the animals quickly form an inseparable bond.

This heart-warming story of friendship expands into an exploration of identity and belonging. The author employs a change of perspective and Swoop questions whether she is human, cat, or bird. The bird's point-of-view is explored through dialogue between Swoop and a kingfisher, who reveals that Swoop is indeed a bird and sends her off in search of a flock of magpies. After contemplating and appreciating all that she has experienced with Matt and Mogli, Swoop chooses to join her magpie family.

Typographic features are used to highlight key vocabulary and the themes of friendship and family. Notes and photographs from the author at the back of the book reinforce the true origins of the story. They also add detail and explain how Swoop brought author Matt Owens and illustrator Emma Gustafson together to tell her unusual story in this delightful picture book.

Illustration Style

Painted in bold acrylics and supported by digital painting, the illustrations capture the personalities of Swoop, Mogli, and Matt, set in beautiful New Zealand bush, beach, and coastal settings. Children will delight in spotting Mogli and Swoop in the clouds. Be sure to point out to the students how the illustrator has shown the progress of time and the changing nature of life through the unfolding butterfly lifecycle throughout the illustrations.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

During the shared sessions, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and inferences and relate these to their own experiences. Read the passages aloud and have students read alongside or by themselves.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the cover and read the blurb.

- Who is the main character in the story? Who are the supporting characters?
- Where is this story set? How can you tell?
- What do you think this story is about?
- Do cats and birds usually get along? Why/why not?

Comprehension

- How did Matt know the baby magpie needed rescuing?
- What does the word 'swoop' mean? What kind of word is it? (verb) Do you think it is a good name for a bird?
- What words does the author use to show how Matt, Mogli, and Swoop are feeling when Matt introduces the two animals? (worried, curious, nervous, happy)
- Cats are natural predators of birds, yet Mogli didn't hurt Swoop. Why do you think that is?
- What does 'inseparable' mean?
- What were the three categories Swoop wondered if she belonged to? (human, cat, bird)
- What were the three features that Swoop noticed when she visited the kingfisher? (feathers, beak, ability to fly)
- What season is it? How can you tell?
- Why did Swoop feel too shy to go near her magpie family at first? Why was it brave of her to join the magpies? What could have gone wrong? Why was it the right choice?
- What are some of the themes of this book? (friendship, family, identity, and belonging) What does it mean to belong? Can someone have more than one family?
- How many compound words can you find? (firefighter, something, rear-view, firetruck, breakfast, everywhere, kingfisher, neighbourhood, lighthouse, sometimes)
- Look at the photographs on pages 31 and 32 and read 'A note from Matt Owens'. Is this story fiction or non-fiction? How can you tell?



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: SOUND WORKS

The author uses 'squawk' to describe the sound Swoop makes. Discuss that words that sound like the noise they describe are called onomatopoeia. Ask the students to brainstorm sound words that describe the noises different birds make e.g. chirp, cheep, tweet, twitter, hoot, cluck, cock-a-doodle-doo, quack. Get the students to share their list with a partner. As an extension, play audio files of bird sounds from the internet and have the class invent new examples of onomatopoeia to describe the sounds. Invite the students to choose a bird and draw it, adding a speech bubble with its sound.

ACTIVITY 2: LET'S TALK

Swoop and the kingfisher communicate using dialogue. Working in pairs, challenge the students to write dialogue for Mogli and Swoop when they first meet (pp. 8–9), when they are inseparable (pp. 10–11), and when Swoop returns home for a visit (p. 30).

Have the students practise their dialogue with their partner, with one speaking the part of Swoop and the other speaking the part of Mogli, then present to the class.

ACTIVITY 3: BIRD RESCUE

Learn what to do if you find an injured bird. As a class, investigate websites such as:

- www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/what-do-if-you-find-injured-bird and birdcare.org.nz/baby-bird-rescue.

Model designing a poster about bird rescue. Discuss the need for a dynamic heading, image, and text written in short bullet points. Invite the students to make their own posters giving advice on what to do if you find an injured bird or a baby bird.

ACTIVITY 4: ART IN THE CLOUDS

Using pages 28–29 as inspiration, have the students draw or paint their own landscape with pictures in the clouds. Encourage the students to write an accompanying story that features the characters in the clouds.

Remind the students that cloud formations change, depending on the wind, and the characters in their stories could also change, either slowly and naturally as they learn and grow or suddenly through a transformation.

Display the artworks and accompanying writing together.

ACTIVITY 5: BUTTERFLY LIFECYCLE

Refer back to the caterpillar (p. 4), chrysalis (pp. 1, 7, 9, 11, 16, 21, 22, 25, 27), and butterfly (pp. 2, 10, 11, 29) motifs then have the students research the lifecycle of a butterfly online or from books. Ask the students to each draw and label their own butterfly lifecycle.

WRITTEN BY FRANCES MCBEATH

