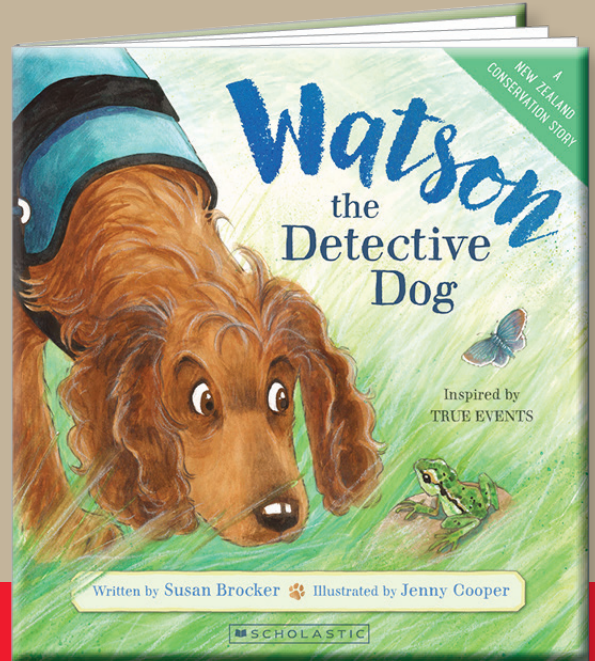


# Watson the Detective Dog

By Susan Brocker

Illustrated by Jenny Cooper



• Reading • Writing • Science • Māori • Art

## Synopsis

When Jon and Chloe got a cocker spaniel puppy as a pet, they noticed how he loved to find the balls they threw for him. No matter how well hidden they were, he sniffed and sniffed and didn't give up until he found them. Chloe suggested that he'd make a great conservation sniffer dog, so they invited a conservation worker to come and meet him.

The conservation worker agreed, and thought Watson might be able to help in locating the eggs of a special endangered species – native whitebait, or inanga.

Jon first taught Watson to follow his hand signals, then began training him to sniff out inanga eggs. (Watson was also very good at sniffing out food and smelly socks!) The training also involved teaching Watson to avoid birds such as kiwi, takahē and weka. As the training went on, a film crew even came to follow Watson as he searched for the jar of eggs that Jon had hidden.

Then came the day that Watson was flown to Dunedin to sit his conservation dog test. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to find the South Island whitebait eggs. They may have had a different smell to the species he knew. But the team were pleased with his progress and thought he should continue training as they believe he will one day make a great conservation dog.

## About the Author

**Susan Brocker** has written over 50 fiction and non-fiction books for older children and teens, which have been published worldwide. She has a history degree and a love of social history that is reflected in her books. Susan also has a close affinity with animals. She lives with her husband and many pets in a lovely old villa on a small farm near Tauranga. Other Scholastic titles by Susan include *1914 Riding into War*, *Ice* and *Caged* for older readers and picture books based on true NZ animal tales; *Bess the Brave War Horse*, *Friday the Rebel Dog*, *Mrs Chippy the Cat* and *Pelorus Jack the Dolphin Guide*.

## About the Illustrator

**Jenny Cooper** lives in Amberley, near Christchurch, and has been illustrating children's books for over 20 years. After gaining a qualification in graphic design, Jenny and her family moved to Samoa, where she taught art, before returning to live in Christchurch and beginning a career as a children's illustrator. In these days of digital art, Jenny is proud to be 'old-school' and still creates her art in pencil and watercolour. In 2015 she won the Mallinson Rendel Illustrator's Award.

With dozens of children's books to her name, Jenny is perhaps best known for her hilarious illustrations for the Topp Twins' sing-along books, as well as her war stories with Glyn Harper.

# Writing and Illustration Style

*Watson the Detective Dog* is a 32-page paperback picture book that will appeal to readers aged 3–7 years old. The passion that the author has for animals, from the itty-bitty inanga (whitebait) to the large and lively cocker spaniel dog is very evident. This heart-warming story is set in New Zealand and is based on real life. Its purpose is not only to entertain, but also to educate the reader about working dogs and the important part they play in conservation at both a local and national level. Susan, a dog lover herself, reveals both the serious and fun-loving side of Watson. The text is written in third person past tense with the dialogue written in present tense. The author has used a number of writing features, such as alliteration and varied sentence lengths. Repetition has also been used to emphasise the actions of this adorable detector dog. On page 32, you get to see a photograph of the real Watson and an acknowledgement to his trainers, as well as a special dedication to all of the friends and family who have loved and supported Watson on his conservation journey.

The award-winning illustrator Jenny Cooper has created her illustrations in pencil and watercolour. Done in a semi-realistic style, Watson and Jon take centre stage, but are supported by a cast of other lovely people and animals. Some of the illustrations are vignettes, while others fill the entire double-page spreads. The pictures are full of expression and humour. The type is set in Gnapsumeule, with some of the dog commands and repetitive actions set in a larger size.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Read the story aloud and have the students read alongside you or follow along as you read. Use some of the questions provided to help guide the students and promote more in-depth discussion. Realistic fiction tells the story of a person or an animal in a real-life setting. The characters act in a way that is true to life. Encourage the students to think about the events in this realistic story and the actions the main characters take. Have them relate them to their own experiences or prior knowledge if possible.

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- Look at the dog on the front cover. Have you seen a detective dog in action? Where did you see it?
- What clues has the illustrator given us about what kind of things Watson tracks down?
- How would Watson track something down? What would he use?
- Why might whitebait be in danger in New Zealand?
- What do you think Watson might do to help save the whitebait?

### COMPREHENSION:

- Look at the illustrations on pages 2–3. What did Watson like to do? Why do you think puppies like to chase things such as balls and sticks? (pp.2–3)
- Have you heard of the cocker spaniel dog breed before? What other dog breeds are you familiar with? How might a cocker spaniel, which is a hunting dog, be suited to tracking down things?
- Dogs respond to short rather than long-winded commands. Jon told Watson to ‘Find it!’ What one-word commands could Jon have used to encourage Watson to get the ball? (p.2)
- If a dog’s tail wags, does this mean that he or she is happy or sad? How is that different to a cat’s tail when it moves from side to side? (p.3)
- Watson sniffed and sniffed. What do you know about a dog’s nose and sense of smell? Explain your answer. (p.3)
- When Watson went back and forth, what was he doing? (p.3)
- Why did Jon tell Watson that he was a ‘Good boy!’? Are you likely to respond to positive encouragement or negative feedback when you are learning something new? Why is that? (p.5)
- Have you heard of the famous detective Sherlock Holmes and his helper Dr Watson? Why do you think that Watson was a good name for the dog? What other things should you think about when naming a dog? (p.5)
- What is an ‘endangered species’? Have you seen a dog on TV or in real life help protect other animals? If so, what did the dog do? (p.5)
- What do you think a conservation worker might do? (p.6)
- Most dogs are good at sniffing things out. What skills would a conservation dog need to be born with to make him or her a good working dog? (p.6)
- What skills or traits do you think a person might need in order to be able to train a conservation dog? (p.8)



- Why might a conservation dog that is trained to help whitebait not be able to help penguins or other animals in the wild that are in danger? (p.8)
- Long ago, Māori caught whitebait in woven flax nets. What else did they make out of flax? What is the Māori name for whitebait? (p.10)
- Why would the whitebait need to be moved from the polluted rivers? (p.10)
- Dogs have the advantage of being able to find and see the whitebait eggs before they stand on them by accident. Why is this a strength? (p.11)
- Why did Jon need to teach hand signals to Watson? Why would a river be loud? (p.12)
- Why did Jon say the commands while he was teaching Watson the hand signals? (p.13)
- What do you notice about Watson in the illustration on page 14? Why would a working dog wear a harness? (p.14)
- Why would Watson need to know what īnanga eggs smelt like? (p.15)
- Why did Jon set a test for Watson with the pipes, jars and hidden whitebait? (p.16)
- Why did Watson lie down beside the pipe when he smelt the whitebait? Why do you think Jon taught Watson to do that? Why do you think Watson liked finding the whitebait? (p.17)
- Why did Jon take Watson to his classroom? How would educating his students help whitebait in rivers? (p.18)
- What is 'biology'? What do biologists study? (p.18)
- Was Watson working when he found the boy's apple? Have you ever seen dogs at airports that are tracking down food in people's bags and suitcases? Why are those working dogs doing that? What might happen if certain bugs get in the country that might not live here at the moment? How important is the work of our working dogs? (p.19)
- The life cycle of īnanga is unusual. The adult female fish lay their eggs in vegetation at the edge of the water. Why did Jon hide the tube of eggs in the grasses? (p.20)
- With many working dogs, when they track down what they are trained to find, such as whitebait eggs, kiwi eggs or chicks, or even illegal substances in postal packages, they are rewarded with their favourite thing. For many dogs, that is time to play with a toy. What was Watson's idea of a fun reward? (p.21)
- The author wrote that Watson rolled about in a 'pongy puddle' full of pūkeko poo! These two words start with the same letter sound. What other words that start with the same letter sound could the author have used, such as *gross grass*, *stinky soil* or *putrid pile*? (p.21)
- Why did Watson's collar vibrate whenever he smelled the birds? How might the collars help the trainers teach the dogs? (p.22)
- Why did Watson like going back to smell Jon's socks? How were they comforting for Watson? (p.23)
- Why did Watson ignore the animals such as the frogs, geckos, eels and pūkekos? How do you think Jon would have reacted to that? (p.24)
- Why would a film crew find Watson and his new-found skills interesting? (pp.26–29)
- Which island did Watson live on in New Zealand? If Watson couldn't smell the whitebait from the South Island, what does that tell you about the whitebait? (p.30)
- How might Watson's training continue? What might he learn next? (p.31)
- Read about the real Watson on page 32 and how this story was inspired by his conservation work. What do you think the trainers of the real Watson would think about this wonderful book about him? (p.32)

# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: WEAVE IT

On page 10, the author talks about how Māori caught whitebait in woven flax nets long ago. Learn how to weave using two different-coloured pieces of paper. Use the Internet to help you with the steps that you need to follow. You will need two different-coloured pieces of paper, a ruler, a pencil, a glue stick and scissors. You could also give flax weaving a try if your class is able to get hold of some flax. There are some protocols or rules (tikanga) to follow when gathering and working with flax. For instance, don't harvest flax in the rain or at night and don't throw the pieces that you don't use in the rubbish bin. Instead, return them to the land. It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the tikanga before you start working with flax.

## ACTIVITY 2: JOB SKILLS

Watson has many skills that make him a good conservation working dog. Think about human conservation workers. What skills do they need? What makes them want to help plants and animals? In groups, write a job advertisement for a conservation worker who's going to work with dogs like Watson. Be sure to include important information, such as the job's description, the work skills needed and any previous experience required. There might also be some personal traits and characteristics you could list that might be helpful for the job. Share your completed job advertisement with the rest of the class.

## ACTIVITY 3: A WHITEBAIT LESSON

Jon was a biology teacher. Explain to the students that whitebait usually live for about one year. Discuss each of the four stages of a whitebait's life cycle and in what season each stage takes place in. Jot down notes on a whiteboard or a large piece of chart paper for the students to refer to. Talk about how in autumn, the adult females swim down the freshwater river to breed. During a high spring tide, they release their eggs in the flooded vegetation by the river's edge. On the following spring tide, the eggs hatch and the larvae are carried out to the saltwater ocean. In winter, the larvae spend time at sea and grow into whitebait juveniles. In spring, the juveniles return from the sea and start to migrate upriver in large shoals. In summer, the young fish feed on insects and grow into adults, and then the cycle begins again. In pairs or groups, create a poster that depicts the life cycle of whitebait. You could use these subheadings: *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring* and *Summer*, or you could use these subheadings: *Eggs*, *Larvae*, *Juvenile Whitebait* and *Adult Whitebait*.

## ACTIVITY 4: WATSON'S REPORT CARD

On pages 22–23, all the dogs were tested at the training camp and put through a series of tests. Design a report card that Jon and Watson might have received about Watson's performance during his tests. Think about what the judges would be looking for and how they might score the various skills. It's important that a working dog is judged on his or her motivation, personality, energy levels, behaviour, tracking skills and ability to follow hand signals. You could demonstrate how to create a report card before the students start work on their own.

## ACTIVITY 5: A TV INTERVIEW

One day, a film crew visited Watson and interviewed Jon. Imagine the conversation between the reporter and Jon. In pairs, practise a possible conversation between the two of them. The reporter could ask Jon five questions about Watson and the work that he does. Practice your TV interview and then present it to the rest of the class.

Written by Janine Scott

