

# Tui Street Tales

By Anne Kayes

• Reading • Listening • Writing • Art  
• Retelling • Research • Art • Similes



## Synopsis

Once upon a time some fairy tales came to Tui Street and visited the people who lived there. There were some problems in the street: Jack's mother had secrets, the creek had dried up, and Terri was being cyber-bullied, to name a few. Following a fairy-tale project at school, the children began to notice fairy-tale themes to these problems. They started to explore the difference between fact and possibility as they sought answers. Added to this was the involvement of Aotearoa's landscape, birdlife and folklore. Luckily, facing challenges led to unexpected achievements, such as coaching a wheelchair soccer team, pacifying a wild creature from Māori folklore and re-thinking stereotypes about giants. Everyone lived happily ever after. Well, as much as can be expected when you have homework and dishes to do.

*Tui Street Tales* is a collection of seven stories set in New Zealand for children aged 8–12 years. The stories explore elements of the European fairy-tale genre in a modern New Zealand context. The stories are connected by two key characters, Jack and Tim, who believe that there is a fairy-tale theme underlying the events occurring in their street. They, along with the other Tui Street kids, become involved in solving the puzzles and challenges facing them in each story.

There are recognisable elements of traditional fairy tales in the stories. These include some plot features from traditional fairy tales. For example, the character, Ella, has two stepsisters and a stepmother, a boy is trapped/held captive in his upstairs bedroom, and a giant lives up a tall tree. Symbolic features are also used, such as the pea from *The Princess and the Pea* and the mirror from *Snow White* (which transfigures into a computer screen and mobile phone, enabling access to social networks – modern tools that reflect and speak about who we are).

At the same time, there are subversions of traditional fairy tale elements. First, the interaction of the European fairy tale with a New Zealand setting. Secondly, there is the subversion of the behaviour of archetypal characters, such as the 'wicked stepmother' and 'evil giant'. Subverting traditional gender roles in fairy tales is a third point of difference. For example, Terri is better than the boys at soccer, and boys are attributed with more sensitivity than in a traditional fairy tale. Also, although Jack and Tim thread the stories together, the seven stories focus equally on both female and male central characters. A fourth point of difference is the subversion of plot expectations, so that readers have a 'puzzle' to work through. For example, in 'The Seven at the Bottom of the Street', the seven small letterboxes will lead a child to assume that seven dwarves live down the driveway, when in fact this isn't true.

Some archetypes are simultaneously maintained and subverted. For example, the archetypal nurturing or mentor role, usually given to supernatural or ordinary women, is instead given to the school teacher (Mr Tāmāti), Tim's father and the wheelchair soccer player, Jason.

Finally, the themes of traditional fairy tales, because of their continued relevance today, have remained in the stories. For example, in 'Recycling Ella', parental death, grief and neglect are central themes. In 'Harry and Gemma', the twins experience the insecure jealousies of a step-parent and feelings of abandonment by their father.

## About the Author

Anne Kayes has a background in Drama and English secondary school teaching. She has written many plays for her students and has dabbled in stand-up comedy, and toured NZ schools with a solo show for a year. Anne has taught English and Drama in schools in Auckland, Kuwait and London. When her children were small, and as they grew, she enjoyed the huge range of wonderful stories available to them and began to experiment with some of her own ideas for children's books. Anne won the 2016 Storylines Tom Fitzgibbon Award for her collection of stories, *Tui Street Tales*. The idea was developed as her thesis in a Masters of Creative Writing at AUT in 2014. Anne now divides her time between writing, teaching in Bridging Education at Unitec, and working in a publishing collective called Cloud Ink Press. Anne lives in Mt Albert with her husband and two teenage children.

## Writing Style

*Tui Street Tales* combines everyday New Zealand life with fractured fairy tales and Māori folklore. Each chapter stands alone although they all intertwine with each other as the familiar characters appear within each chapter, taking turns as the main character. The stories present a series of problems with clues and solutions for the children of Tui Street to solve, with the help of adults, friends and magical characters that live in their street.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

- Cover: Explain that the tales in the book are based on traditional fairy tales and ask the students to be on the lookout for clues throughout the book.

### JACK AND THE MOREPORK

- What is a morepork? Considering the title of chapter one, what fairy tale do you anticipate the chapter will be based on?
- What is 'like a long ink stain that shifted with the sun' an example of? (p. 7)
- Can you think of another explanation for why Jack's mum would have such a big spoon? (pp. 8–9)
- What is a 'hypothesis'? (pp. 10–11)
- What do you think Jack and Tim will do if they find enough facts to prove there is a giant in the tree? They think Jack's mother is feeding the giant and doing his washing. Are you surprised they're not worried about her safety? (pp. 12–13)
- What had Jack's mum done to help George? Why? Why do you think she isn't afraid of him? (pp. 16–17)

- Why can't Jack and Tim tell anyone else about George? What do you think would happen if everyone found out? (pp. 18–19)
- Were you right in your prediction about which fairy tale this story was based on? (p. 20)

### RECYCLING ELLA

- Considering the title of chapter two, what fairy tale do you anticipate the chapter will be based on?
- If you were concerned for a friend the way that Tim is about Ella, what would you do? Who would you tell? (pp. 24–25)
- What does 'tousled' mean? Why does Jack call Ella 'Recycling Ella'? (pp. 26–27)
- Why do you think Ella isn't responding to Serena's attempts to be kind to her? Why doesn't she like walking to school with her little stepsisters? (pp. 28–29)
- How do you think Serena feels when Ella reminds her dad about times they shared with her mum? (pp. 30–31)
- What does 'plump' mean? Can you think of a synonym for 'plump'? Why won't Ella help Serena and Lucy with the boxes? (pp. 34–35)
- What does 'mesmerised by its gleam' mean? (pp. 36–37)
- How did Serena get all the rubbish so clean and smelling so nice? Why is Tim so suspicious of Serena? (pp. 38–39)
- Who comes to help Serena? Where do they come from? What does 'merriment' mean? (pp. 42–43)
- What is making Ella unhappy? Why don't Jack and Tim understand her unhappiness? (pp. 44–47)
- Why was Ella's dad's laugh so different from his voice? (pp. 48–49)
- Why do you think Ella thought she needed to warn her father that the portrait was of her mother before he saw it? (pp. 50–51)
- Why do you think Ella and Serena walked home alone instead of going in the car with the rest of the family? (pp. 52–53)
- Who does Jack think Serena is? Do you agree? (p. 54)

### HARRY AND GEMMA

- Can anybody guess which fairy tale chapter three might be based on? What fairy tale can you think of that has a boy's and a girl's name for a title?
- Why did the twins have two homes? (p.55)
- What kind of school do you think 'Visions' is? Why does Jack compare his mother to Professor X? (pp. 56–57)
- Why doesn't Harry like Visions School? What have you learnt about Lula so far? (pp. 58–59)
- What's it like for Harry and Gemma to live with Lula? Why do you think she is so strict about things being neat and clean? How do you think Lula feels about Harry and Gemma? (pp. 60–61)



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- How is life different for Harry and Gemma when they are staying at their mum's house? (pp. 62–63)
- Why does the teacher have a problem with Harry's hair? Do you think that's fair? (pp. 64–65)
- How will Gemma and Harry find their way back to their old school? (pp. 68–69)
- How is Lula using the children's phone? (pp. 72–73)
- Do you think that it's safe for the children to take the train by themselves? (pp. 76–77)
- Do you think Jack was right to tell his teacher what Harry had told him? Would you have told if you were Jack? (pp. 78–79)
- What does 'Titiro ki ngā pukapuka' mean? (pp. 80–81)
- How does Gemma 'carry a little bit of home with her' like the man on the train advised her to do? (pp. 82–83)
- Can the children trust Jack's mother? (pp. 86–87)
- The policeman tells the children that he wants to help them. Do you think he could be working for Lula? What flies out of the scrubby bush? (pp. 88–89)
- Do you think Harry and Gemma are offering their father a fair solution to the problem? Is their father more worried about them or Lula? (pp. 94–95)
- What happens to Lula when the kereru swoops down? (pp. 96–97)

## WAIMOE

- What does 'thwacked' mean? Can you think of a synonym for 'thwacked'? (pp. 100–101)
- What does 'waimoe' mean? Are there place names in your area with 'wai' in them? (pp. 102–103)
- What do you think could have happened to Waimoe to make it the way it is now? Do you think it's strange that Jack's mother refers to the creek as 'her'? (pp. 104–105)
- What does 'inhabitants' mean? What do you think the children are about to find at the creek? (pp. 106–107)
- What are 'patupaiarehe'? Are they dangerous? (pp. 108–109)
- Why do you think Jack's mum won't say any more about the creek and the dam? Do you think she had a part in the destruction of the dam? (pp. 110–111)
- Do you think it's safe for the children to go to interview Mr Thompson? How will Edmund keep them safe? (pp. 112–113)
- What do you think Mr Thompson is afraid of? (pp. 116–117)
- At first, the kids wanted to save the creek to get good marks, but now they care more about getting the creek running again. What changed their priorities? (pp. 118–119)
- What does Jack's mum call the creature? (pp. 126–127)
- The children have each been punished by their parents for lying. Whose punishment do you think is the worst? Why? (p. 131)
- Do you think people will be willing to help with the cleanup and planting? What if they knew about the Maero? (pp. 132–133)

- How do the children try to convince Mr Thompson to be part of the planting in his back yard? (pp. 134–135)
- How do the adults try and convince him? How would you have convinced him? (pp. 140–141) Who convinces him in the end? (pp. 142–143)
- Where do you think the Maero went? (pp. 144–145)

## CLOUDBIRD

- Why do you think Louie spends all his time inside at home? (p. 146–147)
- What incentives does Mr Tāmāti give the children to try to get them walking to school? (pp. 148–149)
- What fairy tale does Louie's life remind Jack of? How does Tim react when Jack mentions fairy tales? (pp. 150–151)
- Why might Edmund be so bothered by the tui? How do you think Louie will react to the kids trying to climb up into his room with biscuits? (pp. 154–155)
- Do you think Louie's mother is being reasonable about him not walking to school? (pp. 160–161)
- What else do you think Mr Tāmāti might have wanted to say to Louie's mother when she came to school to check he was there? (pp. 172–173)

## LUCY, THE PEA AND THE SHAGGY DOG TREE

- Why does Mr Tāmāti call Lucy the class 'story-weaver'? Do you have a 'story-weaver' in your class? (pp. 186–187)
- How does Lucy prepare for the possible visit of the princess? (pp. 190–191)
- How do the children decide to test if the princess is who she says she is? (pp. 196–201)
- How does the Tui Street gang distract the reporters from the princess? Who, or what, saves the day by giving them another story to report on? (pp. 202–208)

## THE SEVEN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STREET

- What did the kids know about the owners of the seven low letterboxes? Why doesn't Terri just pretend it wasn't her that damaged the letterbox? (pp. 214–215)
- What do you think the letterbox owners want to see Terri about? Is it a good idea for her to take her friends? (pp. 218–219)
- Do you think Terri will be able to learn the rules of wheelchair soccer in order to coach the much older players in 'The Seven'? (pp. 222–224)
- Why is Antonia calling Terri 'dwarf' and 'midget'? What do those words mean? (p. 225)
- What are the main differences in playing soccer in a wheelchair? (pp. 226–227)
- Why do you think Antonia is continuing to target Terri? What would you do if someone put up a post like Antonia did about you? What does the coach do to try and fix it? (pp. 229–233)



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- Do you think Jason is right about Antonia being jealous of Terri? (pp. 236–237)
- What fairy tale character does Tim think Antonia is? (p. 246)
- Why do you think Terri didn't tell Jules the truth about how she hit her head? (pp. 247–249)
- Does learning more about Antonia's mother help you better understand Antonia's behaviour? (pp. 254–257)

## Activities

### ACTIVITY 1: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- Ask the students to choose a chapter they particularly liked and ask them to continue the story. They might choose to continue from the next day, or jump a year ahead. Does the monster come back to the creek? Does 'The Seven' win the tournament the following year? Does Louie's mother start to relax the rules?

### ACTIVITY 2: FRACTURE A FAIRY TALE

- The author took elements from well-known fairy tales and some lesser known Māori folk tales and joined them with stories about everyday life in New Zealand today. Ask the students to choose a fairy tale or folk tale and write a story with themselves as the main character and elements that are familiar to their own lives.

#### COVER DESIGN

- Get the students to design a cover for the story they've written in Activity 2. Ask them to consider colour, the title, font and illustration elements in their design.

#### SYNOPSIS

- Using the story created for Activity 2, ask the students to carefully consider the main elements of that story to write two synopses of their story. In small groups, have the students share both synopses and use the feedback to choose the best one for their cover.

### ACTIVITY 3: SIMILES

- The author uses similes to illustrate the story, for example:

*The moon was low. Its bony elbows of light nudged the green bins set out on the kerbs like messy Lego pieces. (p. 40)*

*Worry seemed to be tugging at him, like an anchor keeping a boat from pulling free. (p. 159)*

- In small groups, or as a class, list some everyday situations (e.g. the sun setting, or a ball hitting a wall) and ask the students to develop similes to illustrate the situation to a listener or reader. Share the similes in small groups.

### ACTIVITY 4: RESEARCH

- Throughout the book there are several stories about birds. Ask the students to research a fairy tale or folk tale about a bird and use the story in an art lesson relevant to the term's art focus to produce a picture, sculpture, etc.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- Art: Students bring in recyclables and use them to create a piece of art.
- Research: Students visit a local creek and record items of litter in the creek. They then think of an 'intervention' to help decrease this pollution, e.g. design posters to put up around the creek area. The school grounds or neighbouring streets could work just as well.
- Te Reo: Mr Tamati says, "Titiro ki ngā pukapuka", which means, "look at the books". Students could research other possible instructions in Māori, e.g. Look at the board. Stand in a line. Sit down. Listen carefully. They practise these and the teacher uses them frequently so that students become familiar with them and don't also need the English translation eventually.
- Creative Writing: Students write a small story pretending to be one of the magical characters: George, the patupaiarehe, the Maero, the small people in Recycling Ella, Cloudbird, the Kereru. They could tell the story from their perspective, e.g. for Cloudbird it might begin with, "Every day I chirp and cluck to the boy in the window. It's important that I help him know he has a friend. One day, he is particularly sad ..."

Written by Sarina Dickson



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