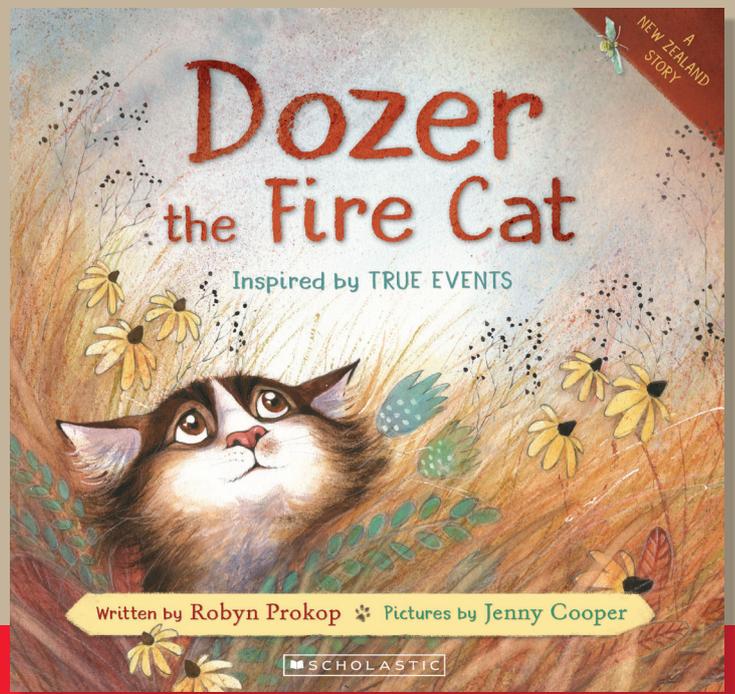


Dozer the Fire Cat: Inspired by true events

By Robyn Prokop
Illustrated by Jenny Cooper

- Maths • Reading • Writing •
- Social Studies • Art •



Synopsis

Dozer the Fire Cat is a story about a family preparing to evacuate their house in Pigeon Valley. The largest fire since 1955 is advancing on their house and while the volunteer firefighters fight the blaze, around 3500 people leave their homes.

While one family packs up, their cat Dozer is doing what Dozer always does . . . stalking, pouncing, washing . . . and sleeping. The family call him as they throw things into the car, but Dozer doesn't respond. In the end the distraught family has to leave Dozer behind.

When Dozer wakes up nobody is home and there is choking smoke in the air. Dozer hides until the fire is brought under control. The family are relieved when they come home several days later to find him still alive.

About the Author

Former teacher and principal **Robyn Prokop** traded the classroom for her home office to write full time. She lives on a lifestyle block in Nelson with her husband and three daughters. Her inspiration comes from the stunning New Zealand environment. This is her debut book.

About the Illustrator

Jenny Cooper 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. Jenny has also tutored at Christchurch Polytechnic and participated in several exhibitions of New Zealand illustrators. With many 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. Jenny lives in Amberley, near Christchurch.

Writing Style

Dozer the Fire Cat is a heart-warming true tale about bravery and survival. The story will tug on the heartstrings but has a happy ending. It is set on a lifestyle block in Pigeon Valley, Nelson. The text is in third person past tense. The author has used super-charged verbs e.g. stalking, pouncing, washing, etc., descriptive adjectives, and onomatopoeic words such as buzzed, howled, wailed, meow. There is also simile and alliteration on page 20 ('Helicopters buzzed like angry bees, and water swooshed down from big buckets'), and more alliteration on pages 24-25. The text is written with a range of short and long sentences and includes dialogue from all the characters. The speech has exclamation marks to show they are yelling. Repetition has been used to emphasise the busyness of the family but also shows what each family member treasures. For example, 'Mum **packed** the passports, Katie **packed** Mr Brown, and Floyd **packed** his paints. . . while Dad **packed** the chickens.' The ellipsis symbol. . . has been used to pause the story but also keep the reader hooked to find out what else Dozer does. The characters feature Dozer's family: two children and a mum and dad, plus Dozer the tabby cat. The 32-page book includes backmatter with facts about the Pigeon Valley fires. *Dozer the Fire Cat* has been written for the 4- to 7-year-old age group.

Illustrations have been created in pencil and watercolour. Some of the illustrations are on full double-page spreads and others are smaller illustrations on a cream background. The illustrator has given plenty of space to show the mischievous expressions on the cat's face which also emphasises his aloneness, whereas the illustrations featuring the family show pictures and text from all four family members on a double-page spread. The typeset is in Old Claude font.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. Who or what do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?
- On first glance at pages 4–5, what do you think is the problem in the story?
- Who is the main character? Predict what is going to happen to him.
- What does evacuate mean? Where do you think they will go?
- What precious possessions would you take if you had to evacuate?
- When you look at what each family member packs into the car, what does it tell you about them?
- Why don't the family go looking for the cat instead of just shouting for him?
- When you see all the things Dozer likes to do, what does it tell you about this cat? Does his name reflect his personality?
- How do you think the family is feeling on pages 14–15?
- How do you think Dozer will feel when he realises the family has gone without him?
- Has anyone in the class smelled smoke from a fire? How did it make you feel?
- What are the helicopters doing in the sky?
- Why has the author said they 'buzz like bees'? What is it called when an author does that?
- Which people are trying to put out the fire and what are they using?
- Why doesn't Dozer like the ash sticking to his paws?
- Why does Dozer need a cuddle?
- What other types of animals can you see on pages 24–25?
- What other animals on this page start with 'd'?
- How do you think the family feel when they see Dozer running towards them?
- How does Dozer show he is happy to see them?
- How big was the fire?
- Can you find another name for fire on the facts spread (pages 30–31)? Brainstorm some other fire words.?
- What is a monsoon bucket?
- Who helped save the animals and how many did they save?
- Why did Leon win a trip on a helicopter?



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: ACT IT OUT!

Ask the students how the characters in the story were feeling? How did their feelings change throughout the story?

Ask some students to pretend they are Dozer. Call out instructions, such as, 'You are Dozer too busy pouncing. Now you're Dozer too busy washing. Show us how Dozer sleeps. What is Dozer's expression when he realises he is alone – what does he do with his body?'

Ask other students to pretend they are the family, packing, grabbing, remembering things to put in the car – and calling out to Dozer. What are their expressions when they realise they have to go without Dozer?

Have others pretending they are the firefighters, some on the ground and some in helicopters. How are they feeling while they are fighting the fire?

Then bring the cat and family actors together to show the final scene. Students in the audience can ask the actors how they felt while playing those parts.

ACTIVITY 2: FAVOURITE THINGS

The family packed the car with their favourite things or things they felt they couldn't do without. What did the mum take? What did the dad take? What did the girl take? What did the boy take? Which things were 'need to have' and which things were 'want to have'?

Ask the class what their favourite things would be and write them on the board. Then sort those things into categories, e.g. toys, comfort, food. Ask the students to put their hand up if they'd take a toy or blankets or food, etc. Tally those results and then construct a graph. Analyse the graph afterwards.

Extension activity: Encourage kids to make up their own survey, tally and graph and present to class.

ACTIVITY 3: DETECTIVE EYE

Ask the students to compare the illustrations of Dozer and the photograph at the back of the book. What are the similarities and the differences between the photo and the illustration?

Then students can choose their own photograph of something in the natural world (animals, plants, trees, flowers, birds) and create their own illustration of that photograph.

ACTIVITY 4: WHAT WOULD I DO?

Read the story up to the point where the family leaves the cat behind. Brainstorm with the students different resolutions and what their outcomes could be. Draw a line on the board or use a piece of string to show there is a line. Then ask students to place themselves on the line between two of the alternative endings. The closer a student stands to one end shows their support for that alternative. Students can then see the range of opinion within their class. Afterwards, students can share why they placed themselves where they did on the line.

