

# Diary of a Pukeko

Author: Sally Sutton

Illustrator: Dave Gunson

## Synopsis

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*Diary of a Pukeko* is a unique and humorous story about a young Pukeko who chronicles his life and adventures in the wetlands. He attends school, feels insecure about his looks and has a huge crush on the gorgeous Indigo Tuk-Tuk. Will the young Pukeko win the favour of his beloved or will she fall for the charms of his arch-enemy Billy Flicktail?

## Text Type

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*Diary of a Pukeko* is a humorous story written by New Zealand author Sally Sutton. Beautifully illustrated by Dave Gunson, the novel tells the story of a young Pukeko who lives in the wetlands. The novel is unique in that the author uses the technique of the suspension of disbelief to create a world where the young Pukeko attends school and leads a life similar to a human. Sutton portrays a number of typical teenage issues through the main character which young readers will be able to relate to, while also giving a special insight into the life and habitat of Pukekos. Suitable for both boys and girls this novel is appropriate for juvenile readers. The illustrations help reinforce events that occur in the story, develop character and add interest to ensure that all readers are engaged.

## Sharing the Novel

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*The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 5-10, pp. 12-31 and pp. 32-50.*

*During the shared sessions have students identify any words or ideas presented in the novel that they are unfamiliar with. It would be a good idea to have students conduct some personal research about Pukekos; studying their characteristics and their habitats before reading the story so that students understand the context. Encourage students to identify the ways in which the author gives the young Pukeko human characteristics. Can they relate to any of the young Pukeko's experiences or feelings?*

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What do you know about Pukekos?
- Where is this story set?
- What is the name of the family that this story is about?
- What happened to Great-Uncle Perky?
- Why is the main character in the story embarrassed?
- Who is the main character in the story in love with?
- The novel is written in the form of a diary. What do you expect from a text set out in this way?
- How do you know that this story is written by a New Zealand author?

*Teacher reads pp. 5-10 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.*

## Comprehension pp. 5-10

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- What does the narrator learn from his history teacher?
- Who is Billy Flicktail? How does the narrator feel about him?
- Why is the narrator so self-conscious about how he looks?
- Who is Indigo Tuk-Tuk? How do you know that the narrator likes her?
- Who comes over for Christmas lunch? What do they eat? How does the narrator feel about his guests?

### Discussion

- What is the date of the first diary entry?
- What do you learn about the narrator in this section of the story?
- What human characteristics do the Pukekos and other birds possess? How do you know that they are actually birds?
- Predict what will happen in the story next.

*Students read pp. 12-31 independently before the next shared session.*

## Comprehension pp. 12-31

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- Who gate-crashers the dance? What 3 things does he do that annoy the narrator?

- What does the narrator do to try and impress Indigo? What goes wrong?
- What does the narrator's teacher sign him up for? How does the Pukeko feel about this?
- Who is Porp?
- Why does the narrator think that "human beings are disgusting"?
- Why is school closed for a week?
- How does the narrator spend the week?
- What does Billy Flicktail dare the narrator to do? How does the Pukeko feel about what he has done? Who sees him when he tries to return what he has taken?
- Why is the Rail family in mourning on June 19<sup>th</sup>? What valuable lesson has this event taught them?
- Who is kidnapped?
- Why does dad decide to visit Mr T? What news does Mr T give them? Why doesn't the Pukeko want to ask him about the Swim-Fly-Run?
- What exciting event happens on September 26?
- How does the narrator feel about the fact that his mother has laid? Who does she invite to share her nest? Why does the young Pukeko think that his mother is a traitor?

### Discussion

- Describe how Pukekos feel about human beings. Are their feelings justified? Why/why not?
- Describe the narrator of the story. What are his strengths and weaknesses? Why does he think that he is a coward? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- Make a prediction about what will happen in the story next.

*Students read pp. 32-50 independently before the next shared session.*

### Comprehension pp. 32-50

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- How many eggs are in the nest? Why does the narrator wish that his mum would lay more?
- How does Pecker Flicktail nearly drown? Who rescues him?
- Why is the young Pukeko left to egg-sit? How does he feel about this? Who walks past him while he is egg-sitting?
- Why doesn't the young Pukeko have any brothers or sisters? Why does his mum feel guilty?

- When does Billy get returned? How does the narrator feel about this? How does Billy's mum react when she sees him again?
- What was Billy trained to do while he was away? Who finds this particularly impressive?
- How does the young Pukeko feel on the day of the big race? Why does he abandon the race? What does this decision suggest about his character?
- How does the Pukeko save his brothers and sisters? What happens immediately after this?
- What does the young Pukeko see on November 10<sup>th</sup> which terrifies him? Who saves his life?
- What important lesson does Mrs Crake share on the last day of term?
- Who is Violet? Why does she think that the narrator is cool?

### Discussion

- What lessons do you think the young Pukeko has learnt during this story?
- What do we learn about Pukekos and their habitat from the story?

## Activities

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**Static Image** - Design a "Missing" poster for Billy Flicktail.

**Static Image** - Design a poster advertising *Diary of a Pukeko* which would be suitable to hang in the school library.

**Oral Book Report** - Write a book report that can be presented orally to the class. Include information about the story, characters, your favourite part and what you think the author is trying to teach us. Include an extract from the novel in your presentation.

**Research** - Conduct a research assignment on Pukekos. Present your research findings on a poster.

**Plot** - Choose an important section of the story and retell it in your own words.

**Poem** - Write a poem about a Pukeko. Use figurative language to build atmosphere and create imagery.

**Writing** - Write a letter to the author explaining what you like about the story.

**Plot** - Complete a flow diagram that shows 10 important events that occur in the story in the order that they occur.

**Climax** - Identify the most exciting event in the story and explain what happens.

*Notes written by Vicki Ladd*