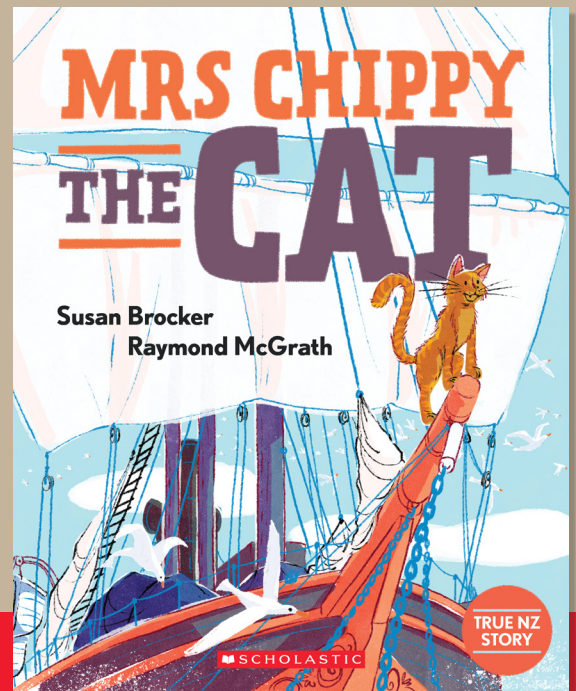


Mrs Chippy the Cat

By Susan Brocker

Illustrated by Raymond McGrath

• Reading • Writing • Social Studies • Thinking Skills •



Synopsis

A ginger tomcat arrives aboard the ship *Endurance* with his master, Chippy McNeish, who is to be the ship's carpenter. The cat soon makes himself at home, sleeping on the bunks, crunching on fish bones given to him by the crew, and climbing every inch of the ship. One of the crew names the ginger cat 'Mrs Chippy' because he says the cat is more loyal than any wife he knows. The cat finds a stowaway hiding on the ship and the two become best friends. Mrs Chippy is also the first to spot the Antarctic pack ice spread out before them. And when the ice sinks the *Endurance*, Mrs Chippy camps with the men and the dogs on the freezing ice floe.

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. *Mrs Chippy the Cat* is the third in a picture book series based on true NZ animal tales. Previous titles are *Friday the Rebel Dog* and *Bess the Brave War Horse*. Susan's other title with Scholastic is for older readers and is the first book in the *Kiwis at War* series: *1914 Riding into War*.

About the Illustrator

Raymond McGrath is an award-winning animation director, illustrator, designer and writer who has been working in children's television and advertising for around 20 years. As well as illustrating the other books in this True NZ Stories series, and the award-winning *The Little Ghost Who Lost Her Boo*, Raymond has written and illustrated several books himself. He lives in rural Auckland with his wife and four children, some cats and a Schnauzer!

Writing Style

A heart-warming historical tale, written as creative non-fiction, about Mrs Chippy, a tomcat who was much loved by the crew aboard *Endurance*, the ill-fated ship that sunk in Antarctica in 1915. Written in third person, past tense from the perspective of the cat. The beginning introduces the story with dialogue, letting the reader know that the human protagonist – Chippy McNeish – is going on an Antarctic adventure. It is implied that the tiger-striped tabby will also be on the journey. The setting begins in Chippy’s kitchen, but quickly moves to *Endurance*’s decks and hold, and ends on the ice floe where they camp. The first half of the story shows how Mrs Chippy got her name and endears herself to everybody on board. Several dramas keep the readers hooked: when Mrs Chippy falls overboard, when he finds the stowaway, and when the ship is crushed by the ice. The author has used similes, active verbs, onomatopoeia and personification to make the language interesting. The last page includes facts about the journey to Antarctica and what happened to Mrs Chippy. Two photographs with captions show Mrs Chippy on the shoulders of the stowaway, Perce Blackborow; and the statue of Mrs Chippy on Harry (Chippy) McNeish’s grave.

Illustration Style

The illustrator has drawn the illustrations using a mix of traditional drawing and digital colouring techniques with Adobe Photoshop. Raymond has used a limited palette of colours: mustard/yellow, orange/red, blue and black. Text has been placed on white spaces above or below the illustrations. Illustrations are sometimes depicted in circles/ovals (to represent portholes), or in rectangles, or they hug the text. Men’s faces are often depicted in blue, perhaps to represent how cold it is in Antarctica! Although if you look at the illustrator’s artwork in *Friday the Rebel Dog*, some of the characters in that also have blue faces, so it would appear that it’s just part of the artist’s style.

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, inferences and relate 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.

- When and where is this story set? What makes you think that?
- Who will be the main character in the story?
- What do you think this story will be about, and why?
- Is there anything you already know about the shipwreck of the *Endurance*?

Comprehension questions

- Why would the Antarctic exhibition need a carpenter on board the ship?
- What do you predict will happen to the cat introduced on the first page?
- What is a mouser, and why will it be handy on the ship?
- Investigate what the ‘bulwarks’ are on a ship and where you would find them.
- How did Mrs Chippy get his name? What else could they have called him?
- What does the phrase ‘eating out of his hands’ mean figuratively, and how does the illustrator show that literally?
- What was Mrs Chippy’s favourite pastime on the ship?
- What does ‘man overboard’ mean?
- How did Mrs Chippy fall off the ship? How was he rescued?
- Why did the ship’s biologist say, “That’s one of your nine lives gone”?
- How did Mrs Chippy tease the huskies?
- What did Mrs Chippy find in a locker? How did the cat try to help him?
- What did Ernest Shackleton say to the stowaway to show he had accepted him on board?



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- Look at the spread on pp 18-19, where the ship is heading into the pack ice. Find a simile the author used on page 18, and an example of personification on page 19.
- How did the crew try to break up the pack ice around the ship?
- Where did the dogs live during this time? What about Mrs Chippy? Why the difference, do you think?
- What did the men do to keep themselves busy, and how did Mrs Chippy join in?
- Why didn't Mrs Chippy like the meat the men offered him?
- What does the 'bowels of the ship' mean?
- What finally forced the crew to abandon the ship?
- What sound words has the author used to show the ship is struggling to keep afloat?
- Where did the crew live when they left the ship?
- Why did the stowaway consider Mrs Chippy the crew's lucky charm?
- Look at the pictures of the crew's camp on the ice, and describe what you see.
- What did Chippy McNeish keep busy doing?
- How did the author circle the ending of the story to the beginning?
- Read the fact page at the end of the book. How has Mrs Chippy been remembered?
- Why do you think the author stopped the story before the men were rescued?

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: MAKE A MODEL

Ask the students to look closely at the photos of the real Mrs Chippy on the fact page. What does the statue imply about the cat? How would you describe the personality of Mrs Chippy? Students can then look at other pictures of Mrs Chippy throughout the book. How are they the same or different from the photographs?

Students then decide on a Mrs Chippy pose and sculpt their own model of the cat. Ask them to pick a pose that shows his personality. Afterwards, students can write an epitaph (inscription on a statue or tombstone) about the cat.

Extra: Students use the model to draw the cat from different angles.

ACTIVITY 2: DIARISE IT!

Ask students to write a diary from the cat's perspective about living life on the ship or camping on the ice. They will need to research a timeline of events and use those dates to write about what happened on particular days. Encourage students to include the senses, sound words, and interesting verbs, similes, or personification, like the author has in the story.

ACTIVITY 3: A SHIP'S INVENTORY

On one of the pages, the crew carry boxes off the sinking ship. Ask students to brainstorm what is inside those boxes. Remind them there would have been very little technology. What would they need to keep warm? Cook meals? Navigate? Sleep on? Ask students to write an inventory of what could be in the boxes, then rate what is the most important, with #1 being what they cannot do without, down to what they might have wished they could take with them on the lifeboats.

ACTIVITY 4: COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Other books have been written about this famous adventure. Find another book, for example *Ice Breaker: An Epic Antarctic Adventure* by Maria Gill & Alistair Hughes; *The Boy from Akaroa* by Wendy Dunlop; *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World* by Jennifer Armstrong. Read their stories and then choose one or two to compare and contrast the stories with *Mrs Chippy the Cat* on a Venn diagram.

ACTIVITY 5: THINKING

What if Mrs Chippy had survived the journey? Write an alternative ending of how Mrs Chippy experienced the rest of the trip.

Written by Maria Gill



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