

Ghost Kiwi

By Ruth Paul

• Reading • Writing • Art • Science



Synopsis

When 11-year old Ruby finds herself without her mother or grandfather on New Year's Eve, she sets out for the one place she feels safe – the forest. Accompanied by her adoring dog and an unusual doll she has long-since outgrown, she sets up home in the treehouse, beneath which she discovers a male kiwi has a burrow.

To her great relief, Ruby is soon tracked down by her best friend, Te Ariki Small, aka 'Spider'. Together they realise that local misfit Zane Tucker, recently returned to town after serving a brief sentence for wildlife smuggling, is trying to capture their kiwi – a discovery made more urgent when, late one night, all three of them see a rare white kiwi chick emerge from the burrow.

Stepping up to their role of Forest Guardians, Ruby and Spider return to town, determined to find a way to protect the kiwi. What they unearth is a plot involving not only Zane Tucker, but also the local veterinarian, Kent Todd and an international wildlife smuggling network. With Zane's co-operation, the pair execute a scheme to document Kent Todd in the act of stealing taonga, providing fool-proof evidence they can present to the police to secure Kent's arrest.

In an action-packed climax, things do not go entirely according to plan, but with the unexpected help of some powerful forces hidden deep within the forest, the kiwi are saved and the story races towards its explosive conclusion. With trees that hold hands and friends that bridge cultures, the story takes us from deep inside a kiwi-burrow to a town where families work together to protect the taonga of Tāne Mahuta and up above to the full moon after which the precious white chick is named – Rakaunui.

About the Author and Illustrator

Ruth Paul is an award-winning author and illustrator, with titles *Stomp!*, *Bad Dog Flash*, *Bye-Bye Grumpy Fly*, *My Dinosaur Dad*, *My Meerkat Mum* and the popular *Mini Whinny* series among her Scholastic collection. Her books have been published in NZ, Australia, the UK, the US, Canada, China and Korea. Scholastic titles *The King's Bubbles* and *Lion Guards the Cake* have both won best Picture Book at the NZ Children's Book Awards. Now turning her hand to longer work, *Ghost Kiwi* is Ruth's first middle-grade fiction. Ruth lives on a rural property at Mākara, near Wellington, and found inspiration for this story close to home when wild kiwi were reintroduced to Te-Whanganui-a-Tara after 150 years' absence. She now hears kiwi calling at night and is actively involved in conserving their population and environment.

Writing and Illustration Style

Ghost Kiwi is a mystery adventure story written for children aged 9+. Award-winning author and illustrator Ruth Paul has a special fondness for Aotearoa's treasured taonga – the kiwi. Ruth is fortunate to hear wild kiwi calling at night from her rural home and is involved in a kiwi conservation programme, so this iconic native bird makes the perfect subject to star in her first middle-grade fiction novel. Having personal insight and experience seeing first-hand the dangers that the flightless kiwi faces, Ruth exposes readers to a world that they mightn't know anything about, but about which it is important to find out more.

This compelling story, which is divided into 29 chapters, covers topics such as family relationships, friendships, animal conservation, mental health and supernatural patupaiarehe. The descriptive text is written in the third person past tense, and the type is set in Bembo MT Pro by Carla Sy. The line of text at the top of the front cover 'A girl in a tree, a bird on the ground, a forest full of secrets' hooks you in and leaves you wanting to know what the secrets might be all about.

The drama of the story has been captured in the moody cover illustration too. The full moon, the kiwi and forest silhouettes, the girl running and the orange lights weaving their way around the forest clearing give the book a mysterious and mystical feel. The white feather on the back cover also gives a glimpse into what the dangerous animal smugglers might be trying to track down. The typography of the book's title is also a clue as to what's to come. After all, Te Ariki (aka 'Spider') names the special white chick Rākaunui, after the full moon.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

During the shared sessions, encourage the students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of the characters and events. Have them make predictions, inferences and relate the content to their own experiences. Have the students identify the book's themes and explain how they're developed in the novel. Read the passages aloud with students reading alongside or by themselves. Use some of the following questions for discussion, comprehension checks and making connections.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

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

- Why do you think the book is called 'Ghost Kiwi'?
- Look at the girl in the forest. Where do you think she is running to?
- Have you been in a treehouse before? Did you feel safe in it? Why or why not?
- What secrets do you think a forest might hold?
- Why would wildlife smugglers want to steal a white kiwi?
- Who would buy a rare white kiwi?
- How might Ruby and Spider become true forest guardians?

COMPREHENSION:

- Look at the dedication on page 5. Why do you think the author dedicates the book to the 'future forest guardians and kiwi keepers of Aotearoa'? (p.5)
- How would you describe 'restless and itchy-feeling' air? (p.9)
- From the content of the text messages, how do you think Ruby and her grandfather get along? (p.10)
- Why do you think Ruby is not at the hospital with her grandfather? (p.10)
- Why do you think the dog Surprise was named that? (p.11)
- Have you ever done something like Ruby does crossing over the macrocarpa bridge, where you started off nervous, but over time, you grew more confident and got better at it? How does that make you feel now? (p.12)
- How would the forest make its own weather? (p.12)
- Have you ever stared at a phone that didn't work? What does this tell you about habits and addictions? (p.12)
- Do you think Rex's present was inappropriate or thoughtful? Explain your answer. (p.13)
- Rex found Fundoll at the recycle shop. He washed and repaired it, as well as re-recorded the voice cartridge. What kind of person do you think Rex is? (p.13)
- The author says that Rex 'smiled like a walrus' when Ruby squeezed Fundoll and she spoke. This is a simile, which is a phrase that compares two different things using the words 'like' and 'as'. What other similes could the author use to describe how happy Rex was? (p.13)



- What do you think of Rex's re-recordings? They are a mix of positive and negative sayings. Which messages do you think Ruby would find the most useful? (p.13)
- Do you call your parents or grandparents by their first names? Why or why not? (p.17)
- How did you get named? Does your name mean something? Explain your answer. (p.17)
- Ruby's mother Lola says that a genuine ruby always has flaws. What are your flaws? (p.17)
- Why can a forest guardian not afford to be soft? What does this mean? (p.24)
- Why does Ruby imagine herself laughing and dancing with Lola in the kitchen? (p.25)
- Would you like to sleep in a treehouse alone in the bush with just your dog for company? How would that make you feel? (p.30)
- Are you messy like Rex or orderly like Ruby? How do you feel when someone the opposite to you either makes a mess or is super tidy? (p.34)
- What is a caseworker? Why might Ruby have one? (p.36)
- What do you think the saying 'Everything else is gravy' means? (p.41)
- What might Ruby mean when she says that Gecko-grutz has done his time? (p.41)
- Have you heard of patupaiarehe before? Are they good or bad mystical fairies? (p.45)
- Ruby feels like a loser when the song ends. Have you ever been in a similar situation? Did it make you feel like you wanted to step back into the shadows like Ruby? (p.49)
- What do you think might be special about the Ghost Kiwi? (p.50)
- Why does Rex clam up and change the subject when Ruby tries to talk about the ghostly white monochrome prints? (p.50)
- Why do you think Rex destroyed the trap that was not his? (p.51)
- Why would Rex insist that Surprise wear a muzzle in the forest? What is Rex afraid that Surprise might do? (p.53)
- Rex told Ruby never to mention to anyone that he had real kiwi. He was using them to train dogs not to harm kiwi. Do you think this was okay that Rex broke the rules? Why or why not? (p.54)
- How does an electric collar train a dog? (p.55)
- Ruby admires Tui. What does Ruby admire about her? How does Tui differ from Ruby's mother? (p.57)
- Lola occasionally gets sad and worried and runs away. Why does she do that? (pp.59–60)
- Have you heard of bipolar? If not, how could you find out more about this disorder? (p.62)
- Ruby smacked Amber Collier in the face. How else could she have dealt with Amber's inappropriate behaviour? (p.62)
- Spider can be funny. How does humour help lighten a sad or difficult time? (p.64)
- How would you react if someone karate-kicked a rat onto your forehead? (p.65)
- How do you think Fundoll keeps getting moved to different places all the time? Who do you think is behind it? (p.66)
- Why is it dangerous for a kiwi to shine brightly? (p.69)
- What is a tekoteko? How could you find out if you don't know? (p.70)
- What does Ruby mean by a 'doll cam'? (p.71)
- What does the word 'brooding' mean? (p.73)
- What is so special about the kiwi chick? (p.73)
- Why is Zane Tucker after the chick? (p.74)
- Do you think Zane will be back in a hurry or not? Explain your answer. (p.76)
- Surprise doesn't like Ruby crossing the Drop. Do you agree with him? Why or why not? (p.79)
- What do you think of the way Tui greets Ruby and Spider? Do you think that's appropriate for the situation? Explain your answer. (p.80)
- What can you tell about Ruby and Rex's relationship when she texted him saying 'No dancing till then'? (p.84)
- Irony means the opposite of what the words say. Rex thinks the 'Town of Opportunity' sign is an example of irony. What other ironic words could you put on the sign? (pp.88–89)
- Why does the author describe Rex as a 'trapped animal'? (p.94)
- Why is Ruby so wary around Lola when she visits Rex in hospital? (p.96)
- Why is it so important to take your medication regularly when you suffer from bipolar disorder? (p.97)
- Rex says that white kiwi are 'as rare as hen's teeth'. Have you heard this saying before? Do hens have teeth? How do you think this saying came about? (p.98)
- Do you think Spider's idea of turning the trail camera back on Zane to do some surveillance is a good one? Why or why not? (p.105)
- Would you be brave enough to set up the surveillance camera at Zane's place? Would you feel comfortable lying about your whereabouts to a parent or caregiver? (p.106)
- If Tui is suspicious about Ruby and Spider visiting the library, what could she do about it? (p.109)
- The librarian's nickname is 'Rei of Sunshine'. Do you have a nickname? How did you get it? (p.109)



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

- What does Rei mean when he says that he can tell Ruby and Spider who borrowed the kiwi books because he isn't a doctor or a priest? Why is it important that people such as doctors don't tell your personal business to other people? (p.111)
- Why does Rei want Ruby and Spider to write a book review in return for the information he has? What is he really trying to get Ruby and Spider to do? (p.111)
- What does the author mean when she says that information flows through Rei like water? (p.112)
- What does the chapter heading 'Blindsided' mean? (p.113)
- Would you trust Zane when he invites Ruby and Spider into his place? Why or why not? (p.115)
- Why do you think Zane is telling Ruby and Spider all that he knows? (p.121)
- Do you think Zane should trust an 11-year-old girl and her friend? Would you trust Ruby and Spider? Why or why not? (p.123)
- What do you think Ruby is planning? (p.123)
- Do you think it's sensible to have a backup plan? What would your plan be? (p.126)
- Who do you think Rex's message was intended for? (p.128)
- The author lists three mistakes. What do the mistakes tell you about Ruby and Spider's ability to pull off their plan? (p.140)
- Did you expect Zane to run when trouble brewed or to stay to stand up to Kent like he does? Explain your reasoning. (p.145)
- What do you think made Ruby's arms prickle with goosebumps? (p.147)
- How do you think Ruby and Spider can rescue Zane in such steep terrain? Do you think it would be wise to seek help instead? Why or why not? (p.151)
- The glimmering orange lights are back again. What can they be? (p.152)
- Who do you think is behind the explosion in the distance? What do you think it's all about? (p.152)
- If you had a recording on your phone, what would you do with it? (p.153)
- Kent lifts the box up and rests it on the bridge railing. What does this action tell you about what kind of person he is? (p.156)
- Ruby thinks the white chick is inside the box. Were you surprised to learn that it was actually Fundoll in the box? Explain your answer. (p.158)
- How must Kent have felt when he also learns that he was not caught with a white kiwi chick, but a doll instead? (p.158)
- What might happen if word gets out that a white kiwi exists nearby? (p.168)
- What does the author mean when she says 'moving the conversation to firmer ground'? (p.170)
- Ruby gave Lola a white feather earring. What does this tell you about how Ruby really feels about her mother? (p.172)
- The author ends the story with a glimpse into how Matua Kiwi and his white chick are getting on. Why is this a great way to end the book? (p.173)

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR ACTIVITIES



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: DOLL TALK

On page 13, Ruby unwraps a Christmas present. It was Fundoll that Rex had rescued from the recycle shop and re-recorded sayings for on the voice cartridge. Ruby can't figure out if the sayings are a joke or if Rex is being serious. Fundoll says things such as 'You got this!' and 'Uh-uh, no you don't!' One particular saying that the doll says is 'Everything else is gravy!' When people use this saying, they mean that anything else that happens will be a bonus. Pretend you're someone's grandparent and you have to re-record sayings for Fundoll. What sayings would you record on the voice cartridge? Would they be positive and uplifting, such as 'You got this, girl!' Think about what the purpose of a doll with a voice recorder feature is and how comforting it might be to a child who may have lost a parent or have an absent family member. Write five sayings on a piece of paper, then share them with a friend.

ACTIVITY 2: BIRD-LIKE ME

Ruby lies in the treehouse on page 19 and wonders what kind of feathers she would grow if she were a bird. She thinks she would be a plain bird because she is a plain girl. She also thinks she would have big brown sturdy wings because she is a big girl, so they would need to be sturdy in order to help her fly. Pretend you could design a bird that looks or acts like you. You might like wearing brightly coloured clothes, so you could draw a bird with lots of colourful feathers. You might talk loudly, so your bird could have a large open beak, squawking loudly. Display your finished drawings in the classroom.

ACTIVITY 3: KIWI WRITING

Throughout the book, the author writes excerpts in italics about Matua Kiwi and his exploits of looking after his egg and then chick. We learn about what life is like for a brown kiwi father and his very rare white chick. This text is written in the third person past tense. Now it's your turn to be the author. Choose a part of the story and write a paragraph about what Matua Kiwi and his chick are doing at that moment in time. It might be when Spider slips a piece of wood over the entrance of the burrow or when Kent first sees the white chick or when Matua Kiwi and his chick are free and living without the fear of Kent returning.

ACTIVITY 4: AS SAFE AS...

The morning after Zane sees the kiwi chick, Ruby and Spider check on the burrow and name the chick. However, they soon realise that a white kiwi chick isn't safe. It will be highly sought after by bird smugglers and collectors. The chick is also easy prey to other animals because it can't camouflage itself among the forest plants like a brown kiwi can. The author says that the chick is about 'as safe as a hot chip on a beach full of seagulls'. This is a wonderful quirky way to describe the danger that the chick faces. Have fun thinking about three other ways you could say that the chick isn't very safe at all. Work alone or in pairs. Share your work with the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 5: OUR TREASURED KIWI

There was a rare white kiwi born in captivity in New Zealand in 2011. Her name was Manukura, which means 'the chiefly one'. It was not an albino, a creature lacking colour. Instead she had an extremely rare genetic trait carried by both parents, so she was born with white feathers. Normally, kiwi have brown feathers. The kiwi is a national taonga (treasure) in Aotearoa New Zealand. But did you know that there are five species of kiwi? Research one of these species and then design a poster that tells people about it. Your poster could feature a heading, subheadings, a drawing, a map and five facts. The facts might be about the kiwi and their location, their beak and nostrils, their lifestyle, how they hunt, what they eat, their predators and so on.

ACTIVITY 6: NAME THE CHICK

When Ruby and Spider first find out about the white chick, they wonder what they should name it. They suggest Olaf, Yeti or maybe Snowball, but then Spider comes up with Rākaunui, after the full moon. What would you name a rare white chick? Come up with ten possible names for it and then share your list with a friend.

Written by Janine Scott

