

The Lonely Little Tree

Text by Moya Kirby
Illustrations by
Terri Rose Baynton

- Art • Reading • Writing •
- Thinking Skills • Oral Language •



Synopsis

One tiny tree was all that was left of a forest on a cliff overlooking the sea. The little tree was lonely and wondered what would become of it. A passing bird heard the lonely tree's sad words and announced that it could be whatever it wanted – a forest giant or a Christmas tree. The tree thought about that, then answered that, yes, it would be a giant in years to come, but how could it ever become a Christmas tree? Other birds gathered around and told the tree that they would make it *their* Christmas tree. Each bird brought something from its own habitat to decorate the tree. Soon the tree was a beautiful sight ... but then the birds heard an axeman approaching. They made a horrible hullabaloo, frightening the axeman away. Over time, the little tree grew into a magnificent forest giant – and a legendary magical Christmas tree.

About the Author

Moya Kirby originally wrote this rhyming story as a Christmas play when she was working as a kindergarten teacher in Rotorua. Over the years she has enjoyed a side interest as a children's entertainer. She has written children's stories and poems, and has been published in magazines and the *School Journal*. She has also written songs for Radio NZ's *Grandpa's Place* and won a national song quest. Moya also had a 'Kidult' novel published in 1989, and designed and manufactured her own line of wooden puzzles, 'Interlok Art'. She lives in Tūākau, a small town in the Waikato.

About the Illustrator

Terri Rose Baynton is a children's book author and illustrator, as well as a scriptwriter and storyliner for children's television, working with Weta Productions and Pukeko Pictures. Her first picture book that she both wrote and illustrated, *Mr Bear Branches and the Cloud Conundrum*, was shortlisted for the NZ Post Children's Book Awards. She is also the illustrator of *Dragon Island* (Scholastic NZ) and *Room on Our Rock* (Scholastic Australia). Terri now lives near the shores of Lake Taupo.

Writing Style

The story is written in rhyme (aa, bb), from the third person point-of-view in a 32-page picture book, with 12-70 words per page. The author uses lyrical language that sets the scene for this whimsical story and its natural surroundings: *“Whatever will become of me?” sighed the sad and lonely little tree.* There is also a lovely use of alliteration (‘At last, a fantail fluttered free’ and ‘like tinsel in the moon’s bright beam’) and sentence structures that are reminiscent of traditional poetry: *“My glowing eyes do a stranger see ... He has an axe! To chop our tree!”*

The introduction introduces the main character, setting, and sets up the problem. The middle shows the birds pondering how they could make the tree into a Christmas tree and then finding a solution. The climax shows the axeman coming towards the tree. The conclusion shows the tree reaching its pinnacle: a magnificent forest giant and a mighty, magical Christmas tree.

Illustration Style

Illustrations have been created in pencil and watercolour. The illustrator has used a pastel palette of colours: many shades of green, yellow, purple and blue with a hint of red and black. The only time that changes is in the night scene when the axeman walks towards the tree, using predominantly black and grey. The pictures use lots of flowing curves: for the little tree itself, the swirls of sky, countryside and the half-circle rainbow. The double-page spreads have plenty of white space for the text, which also adds more light to the illustrations.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What do you think is the tone for this story?
- How has the author set the scene on the first page of the story?
- What has happened to all the other trees in the forest?
- What did the little tree say to itself, and why was it feeling sad?
- What did the bird flying past say to the little tree?
- What will the little tree be one day? What could stop that from happening?
- What type of birds gathered around the tree?
- How do you think the birds will make the little tree into a Christmas tree?
- What was the ruru’s suggestion and what will it represent?
- What will the spider make and what does that traditionally represent on a Christmas tree?
- What other decorations did the birds suggest?
- What did the ruru see in the distance that gave the tree and birds a fright?
- How did the birds frighten away the axeman?
- How did the birds celebrate Christmas Eve?
- What did the little tree turn into over time?
- Find some rhyming words from the story that rhyme with these words:
 - sea
 - away
 - bird
 - said
 - round
 - head

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: MORE DECORATIONS NEEDED

The little tree is going to need more decorations as it grows bigger and bigger. Think of some examples of what the following birds might bring from their habitats to decorate the tree:

blue duck (whio)

weka

pheasant

peacock

heron



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ACTIVITY 2: GETTING TO KNOW THE BIRDS

Pick one of the birds featured in the story (tui, kingfisher, robin, kiwi, bellbird, pukeko, ruru), and write down three questions you'd like to learn about that bird. Look in a book of NZ native birds or search on the Internet. Find answers to your questions and then share them with your class in 'Show and Tell'.

ACTIVITY 3: WHAT IF ...

What if the axeman recognised the birds' calls and wasn't frightened? Brainstorm other ways they could frighten off the axeman. Then pick one that you think will be most effective and give your reason why it would be the best choice.

ACTIVITY 4: DECORATE A TREE

Find a fallen branch or a potted shrub and decorate it with natural things from the environment. You might look for things in the school grounds or bring things you've collected from home. You might have found things at the beach, in your garden, or at the local park. Decorate the plant/branch and display in your classroom. Alternatively, draw a tree and decorate it with natural things from the environment.

ACTIVITY 5: PLANT A TREE

Participate in a local tree planting day. Or perhaps your class could plant one or more trees in your school or somewhere local. Consult an adult to see where would be a good place. Write letters to local organisations politely requesting money for trees, or do your own fundraising. (You could have a lunchtime disco and charge an entry fee. Your class will need to ask permission from the principal, and then you'd need to design posters, and a notice for the school newsletter. Ask adults to help organise music and some prizes. After the event, use the funds to buy seedlings.) Plan with your teacher the planting day/time and plant trees in Little Tree's honour. The world needs more trees! Alternatively become part of the Trees for Survival programme (<http://www.tfsnz.org.nz/>) and grow your own trees to plant locally.

Teaching notes by Maria Gill



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