

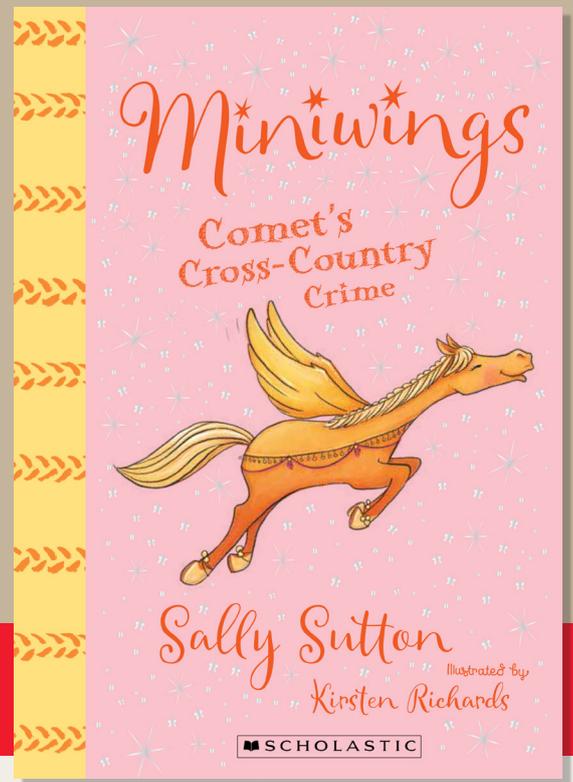
Miniwings #5

Comet's Cross-Country Crime

Text by Sally Sutton

Illustrations by Kirsten Richards

- Art • Reading • Writing •
- Transactional Writing • Thinking Skills •



Synopsis

Sisters Sophia and Clara named their six miniature, winged toy horses 'Miniwings' in Book 1 of the series. In Book 5, Sophia and Clara are hopeful of winning in the school cross-country competition. Clara particularly wants to beat Grace, who has 'magic' shoes. To prepare for the race, Sophia puts Clara through a Five-Point Race-Training Master Plan. They run, until Clara disappears and doesn't come back, and then spends a weekend in bed with a 'sprained' ankle. Sophia tries to get proper sports gear but their mother tells them money doesn't grow on trees. They make healthy smoothies, but most of it ends up smeared around the kitchen. They talk race strategy – well they would've if Clara hadn't been so sleepy at 6 in the morning. They don't have time for the fifth point on the plan as they have woken up so late for school they have to run.

Things start to go wrong right from the start of the cross-country race. Sophia feels really nervous, Grace's 'magic' shoes disappear and, to her horror, Sophia finds them in her bag. Grace accuses her of being a thief, but Sophia knows who the real thieves are. The girls take a shortcut, get lost and a monster-noise scares them. They run into a rubbish bin and have to pick up all its contents. By then they think they have no chance of winning the race, but discover that all the other runners have been sent off in different directions – apparently, someone had moved the orange markers. The girls know who that might have been. The Miniwings confess to their crimes and the girls realise they need to do something to right the wrongs. All the girls race towards the finish line holding hands. Their principal isn't too happy at first until Sophia tells her, "It's more important to be a good sport, don't you think?" The principal couldn't disagree with that so the girls run across the finishing line together, arms raised to the sky like gold medallists at the Olympics.

About the Author

Born in Auckland, New Zealand, **Sally Sutton** decided she wanted to be a writer when she was six years old. She is now a best-selling, award-winning author of many popular books, including *Roadworks* with Brian Lovelock (winner Best Picture Book NZ Post Children's Book Awards 2009) and its sequels *Demolition and Construction*. Many of her picture books have been named Storylines Notable Books.

Sally's first junior fiction series with Scholastic was her humorous, native animal *Diary series: Diary of a Pukeko, Diary of a Bat, Diary of a Frog and Diary of a Sea Lion*, illustrated by Dave Gunson. She is thrilled to be working on chapter books again with the hugely enjoyable *Miniwings* series, illustrated by Kirsten Richards.

Sally loves to write for different age groups, but strives to bring the same qualities to all her writing: a strong plot, lively and rhythmic language, and a big dose of fun. Sally holds an MA (1st class Hons) in German. She has a keen interest in Grimms' fairy tales and European languages, and also enjoys writing plays. She lives in Auckland with her husband and two daughters.



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About the Illustrator

Kirsten Richards grew up in a small village in the Berkshire Downs, in the South of England. After she left school she completed a foundation Art and Design course. Kirsten moved to Swansea where she spent three very happy years studying towards a degree in General Illustration. She graduated in 2006 and emerged bright-eyed and bushy-tailed into the world of children's publishing.

Since then Kirsten has worked on a whole array of exciting projects, including books with Scholastic USA, Oxford University Press, Hodder Children's Books, Thomas Nelson and *Top That!* One of her highlights was in late 2008 when *The Littlest Pilgrim* (Scholastic USA) made its mark, spending three weeks on the *New York Times* bestsellers list.

Since moving to New Zealand, Kirsten has spent time teaching art and design to both adults and children and designing merchandise, souvenirs and fashion garments for children of all ages. She now runs a boutique design and illustration company where she draws, paints and designs to her heart's content. The illustrated junior fiction series *Miniwings* (written by Sally Sutton) is her second project with Scholastic NZ, following on from illustrating Lucy Davey's picture book *Dinosaur Hunting*.

Writing Style

Miniwings is a funny, early chapter book with colourful illustrations that support a reader growing in confidence. The books can be read aloud or read by an independent reader. Sophia, the main character in the *Miniwings* stories, talks directly to the readers in a lively, fun tone. The *Miniwings* speak in their own hilarious language throughout the story, using words such as 'yawny-yawny' (boring) and 'huffly-puffly jogglers' (puffed-out runners). Readers can look at the Dictionary of Miniwing-ese on page 92-93, if they can't understand their language. Scattered throughout the book are diagrams, lists, large fonts, and illustrations to accentuate the text, and help readers understand what is happening in the story.

Illustration Style

Kirsten has created the illustrations in acrylic inks and finished the pictures in Photoshop. There is a range of full-colour double-page spreads, as well as pages with small illustrations, some coloured, some black and white. The pictures are stylised: faces are round with minimal features, and tiny noses and mouths. The images compliment the text by emphasising stand-out parts of the story and drawing the reader in to the imaginative world of the two main characters. Most of the pictures feature the main characters front-on, but when the girls are lost they're drawn from a bird's-eye view and the text boxes look like the canopy of the forest.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. Do you think this is a fiction or non-fiction story? How can you tell?
- Why has the author written a letter to the readers before the story starts?
- Which is your favourite Miniwing and why? Which is the focus for this book?
- Sophia says she doesn't steal or cheat. Write down the sentences that show she has stolen or cheated before. (pages 9-10)
- Which Miniwing do the girls think has got them into trouble this time? (Page 10)
- What verbs (doing words) does Sophia use to describe how the Miniwings fly? (page 11)
- Why do Sophia and Clara think Grace cheats in the races? (page 12-13)
- What is the affirmation (positive words) that Sophia has at the end of her Five-Point Race-Training Master Plan? (page 14)
- What is first on the plan and what do they do? (pages 15-18)
- Where do you think Clara disappears to when she goes jogging? (page 19)
- What is an underling? And who does that mean in the story? (page 21)
- Why is the mother not very supportive of buying them sports gear? How do you know that? (page 23)
- Why don't the girls like the first two smoothie recipes? How do they sound to you? (pages 24-27)
- What happens to the third recipe? (pages 28-29)



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- Why is their mother angry with them? What would you have done to help her? (page 31)
- Why isn't Clara keen on number four in the plan? (page 33)
- Why do they run out of time to practise nerve control? (page 40)
- On pages 42-44 the author has 'foreshadowed' (given you clues about) something that will happen later in the story. What do you think it is?
- Why is Grace upset at the start of the race? Where do you think the shoes might be? (page 49)
- Name some of the things that went wrong throughout the race. (pages 52-63)
- What scares the girls in the forest? (pages 66-73)
- What did they have to do after coming out of the forest that slows them down even more? (page 74)
- Why do they think they have no chance of winning the race? (page 74)
- Why did Grace tell everyone her shoes were magic? (page 76)
- What had happened to the other girls? (page 78-79)
- After Sophia realises the Miniwings have been cheating, what do you think they'll do to right the wrong?
- Why isn't the principal very pleased to see all the girls holding hands? (pages 86-87)
- What does Sophia say and do to win over the principal? (pages 89)
- How do you think it felt to win the race the way they ended it, instead of winning it for themselves as individuals? (pages 91)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: SUPER SMOOTHIE RECIPE

Make up a super-smoothie recipe. It has to be healthy but also something that you'd like to drink. What would you put in it to be healthy? What would make it sweeter – but not too sweet? How would you mix it all up together? After you've written out the recipe, take it home and ask your parents if you can trial it. If they agree to get you the ingredients, make the smoothie, and give it a rating from 0 (yuck!) to 5 (super!).

ACTIVITY 2: FIVE-POINT RACE-TRAINING MASTER PLAN

Make your own Five-Point Race-Training Master Plan. Think about what worked and what didn't work in Sophia's plan and improve on it. Include ways to motivate (encourage) you if you were to carry out the plan. Estimate how long you'd need to do each point in the plan. Compare your plan with someone else's in the class and talk about what might or might not work in each other's plan, and why.

ACTIVITY 3: SING IT!

The Miniwings sing a song on page 29. Using the same format, make up your own short song (six lines) about 'Winners never quit and quitters never win!' You can choose whether it rhymes or not. Then select a small group of singers and sing it in front of the class, or record it and play it to the class.

Teaching notes by Maria Gill



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