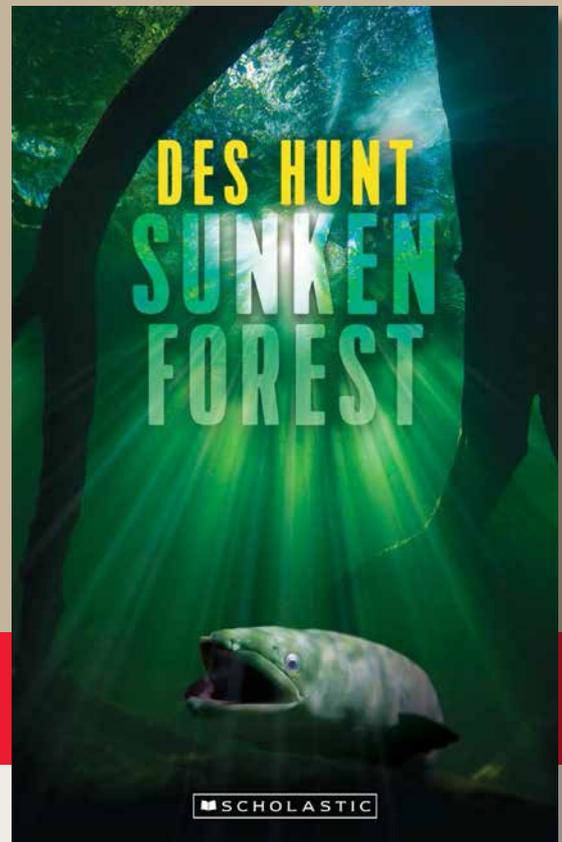


Sunken Forest

By Des Hunt

- Science • Social Studies • Reading • Writing • Listening
- Presenting • Critical Thinking • Geography • Mathematics



Synopsis:

Sunken Forest is an action-packed adventure novel set in a fictitious school camp in the wilds of Lake Waikaremoana, featuring a sunken forest and a giant longfin eel. It explores meaningful issues, such as friendships, peer pressure, bullying, environment, family and heritage.

Sent to live with his grandmother in Hastings after his father is jailed, Matt becomes the victim of bad friends and false accusations, concerning a sum of money stolen from an old woman he had helped out one morning. Sent off on a military-style school camp to the wilds of Lake Waikaremoana, Matt again gets in trouble for something he didn't do, and is unjustly punished. Not allowed to join his school friends on their activities, he spends time alone down by the lake where he discovers a massive eel. Unfortunately, news gets out about the eel Matt has nicknamed Elsa, and the class bad-boy, Cameron, is determined to kill it. Matt is determined not to let him ... but then, following a night of torrential rain, catastrophe strikes the camp when a higher lake bursts its banks and Matt ends up saving Cam's life.

About the Author:

Des Hunt lives at Matarangi on the Coromandel Peninsula. Some years ago he made the transition from writing textbooks for secondary students to novels for younger readers (shortlisted for NZ Post awards three times), while still maintaining his aims of fostering young peoples' natural interest in the science of their surroundings. Des has authored 14 books in this genre.

Of this book, Des says:

In 1957 I attended a summer camp at Waikaremoana. On my first swim in the lake, I looked down and saw stumps of trees sticking up from the bottom; in other places there were piles of fallen logs on the lake floor. When I asked the camp leader about this he said that the lake had been formed by a huge landslide some time before, although he didn't know how long ago it was. At that time I imagined it was only a hundred years or so. That idea was reinforced later in the week when we took a launch trip around the lake and saw the remains of trees still poking through the surface. Only much later did I learn that the event happened more than two thousand years ago, and that the wood in these trees was so hard they still hadn't rotted away.

In March 2011 I spent two weeks working in Opotiki schools for the Book Council. On the middle weekend I returned to Waikaremoana for the first time since that boyhood camp. The place where we had pitched tents 54 years before was now a DoC campsite, and a whole lot more civilised than what we'd experienced. The sunken forest was no longer as obvious, but with the right lighting conditions,



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stumps and logs can still be seen. Only one tree still pierces the surface. Even though there have been changes, to me the place is still magical. As I sat in my car on the lake edge, sheltering from the rain, I began thinking of it as a location for a story.

Two further visits were needed before the story took shape, and it was on one of those that I came across a school group from Gisborne using the area for their school camp. As a teacher I'd supervised several camps and knew of the tensions and excitements that are generated when a group of normal kids move out of the classroom to live together in the wild. I have witnessed many events like those told in this story. Hence, creating a fictitious school camp was easy.

Eels have fascinated me since I first learnt of their amazing life cycle. An eel story was always going to be written at some stage, and Lake Waikaremoana eels fitted the requirements. They do exist in the lake, having been introduced by local iwi as a food source. They can grow to a huge size because there is no way of returning to the sea and completing the life cycle. The one I've portrayed was based on a huge eel I saw living in a stream near the whaling station in the Marlborough Sounds. For a hundred years it had lived on whale scraps leaking into the stream from the factory. The factory had recently closed, stopping the food source, so this eel was left to scrounge scraps from visitors. It did this by coming out of the water onto the grass and begging. She was the perfect model for the Elsa in my story.

A widely respected figure in New Zealand educational circles, and one who enjoys speaking in schools, Des Hunt's other books for Scholastic NZ are: *The Last Tuatara*, *Project Huia* and *Cool Nukes*.

Writing Style

Sunken Forest is a 267-page novel set in Gisborne and Lake Waikaremoana, New Zealand. Popular author Des Hunt successfully combines action-adventure with an environmental message. The story moves quickly with a gripping storyline and a dramatic climax. Written in the third person narrative the reader gains an understanding and sympathy for Matt, the likeable main character. Joining Matt are several strong characters who will divide the reader's loyalties however as the story progresses we gain a greater understanding of why the characters make the choices they do. There are strong environmental messages, however the story also has themes that explore justice, revenge, loyalty, courage and trust.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the front cover. What genre do you predict the book is?
- What is a prologue? Does it always come at the beginning of a book? Is there a clue in the word that tells us where we are likely to find a prologue?
- Do you think Lake Waikaremoana is a fictional place? What do you think the name means? (p.7)
- Who, or what, is Elsa? (p.8)
- What does the phrase 'making money pretty tight' mean? Why would money having been 'pretty tight' have meant that Matt had to be sent away? (p.9)
- What does 'taihoa' mean? Why does the old woman tell Matt to taihoa? Why might Matt have been unsure about going in any further? Would you have been unsure in the same situation? What do you think would be a reasonable reward for the job Matt had done for the old lady? (pp.14-15)
- Why did Matt think that taking her money would be the same as 'peeing on her floor'? Why did he feel that he couldn't take her money? (p.16)
- What did the old lady offer Matt instead of money? Do you think it was a fair reward? What does the phrase 'past the point of no return' mean? (p.17)
- Why did Cam and Jay suggest that Matt carry his bag with him? Do you think they are genuinely worried about Matt getting something stolen from his bag? From their description so far, do you think they are a good choice of friends for Matt? (p.20)
- Why did Cam and Jay give Matt a share of the stolen cards? Based on what you already know about Matt, do you think he would want to take them? (p.23)
- Why were warning sirens going off in Matt's head when Cam asked about what he had seen in the old lady's house? How might Cam and Jay find out what is in her house? (p.25)
- What did Matt's Nana mean when she said, 'Early friends aren't always good ones'? (p.26)
- What does Matt's worry for the old lady tell us about his character? (p.29)
- Why did Matt want to stay away from Cam and Jay? (p.35)
- Why do you think Matt was asked to come to the principal's office? Why did he need to bring his bag? (p.36)
- Why did Matt lie and say he didn't go back to the old lady's house? Do you think it was a mistake for him to lie? Would you have lied? (p.37)
- Why did Matt lie about not having told anyone? What do you think Cam would have said or done if Matt had involved him? (p.38)



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- What did Ms Williams mean when she said ‘like father, like son’? Does finding the jar in a place where Matt was previously seen prove that he took the money? (p.39)
- Based on the information you have so far, do you think it is possible that Matt’s Nana took the money? Do think Sharon Williams might have taken the money? (p.45)
- Why might Matt have been nervous about going into Mr Klineck’s class? Do you think Cam and Jay are more like Matt’s enemies than his friends? (p.53)
- What does the expression ‘come down on you like a ton of bricks’ mean? (p.54)
- What was different about Azura’s appearance from the other girls at Matt’s school? (p.55)
- What are two of the consequences of the lake water getting too low? What is a lure? (p.59)
- What are the reasons Cam gave for wanting to catch a giant eel? Do you think they were good enough reasons? (p.60)
- What does ‘military precision’ mean? (p.64)
- Why would a pa need a great view? What is a vista? What is a straggler? (p.66)
- What has stopped the trees in the underwater forest from rotting away? How long have they been there? How might people be able to estimate how long they had been there? (p.67)
- Why might Cam and Jay suddenly be so unfriendly to Matt at dinner time? (p.73)
- Why does Azura need special food? Why did Matt glance around before telling Azura about the eel? (p.74)
- What is a galley slave? (p.77)
- Why do you think the eel came out of the water? Are you surprised Matt wasn’t frightened of it? (p.83)
- How might Satch have known that the other man’s tattoos were ‘prison tats’? (p.86)
- This chapter was called ‘Monstrous Eel’; does that refer to the eel’s size, or its nature? Do you think that’s a fair description? (p.87)
- Ceela, Eella, Heelen, Isabeel ... all of these names weren’t right, in Matt’s opinion. What would you have called the eel? Why did Matt settle on the name Elsa? (p.89)
- What does the author mean by ‘New Zealand is a country that is still growing’? How do geologists estimate ground movement prior to human inhabitation of New Zealand? Have you ever felt an earthquake? (p.91)
- What does ‘Onepoto’ mean? How was the Onepoto Track formed? (p.93)
- What would a Tarzan-style vine such as supplejack look like? (p.94)
- What is an EpiPen? Do you know anyone who needs one? Does your school have one? (p.95)
- Why do you think Azura doesn’t want to tell Mr Klineck about the marker? What does she say that tells us she doesn’t trust him? (p.103)
- How does Mr Klineck’s phone get a signal when no one else’s can? (p.104)
- What do you think happened to the supplejack at the top of the cliff? Why do you think Maddy lied about not seeing it? (p.107)
- Who do you think is responsible for moving the sign? Do you have any evidence? (p.109)
- What does ‘swaggering’ mean? Why do you think Azura hasn’t told the adults the truth about what happened? (p.110)
- What does ‘feigned regret’ mean? What does ‘remorseful’ mean? Give an example of a circumstance in which you might feel remorse. (p.114)
- Why wasn’t Matt angry at Paul when he found out what Paul had seen and done? Do you think you would have felt the same way as Matt? (p.117)
- Why didn’t Matt and Paul notice Elsa’s arrival? (p.119)
- How does Azura convince Matt that her not telling Mr Klineck was the right thing to do? Do you think Matt can trust Paul and Azura? (p.123)
- What is the plan for revenge on Cam? What do you think could go wrong? Do you think it’s too risky? Do you agree with what they are doing? (p.126)
- What does Munn do with his wire and netting frame? Why would Matt be worried about it? (p.133)
- What is a koura? Have you ever eaten one? Does Munn’s plan to catch one sound like it would work? (p.134)
- Have you ever seen a sign with a skull and crossbones? What was it warning you about? Do you know what sodium cyanide is? (p.135)
- Why did Matt tell Satch he was only allowed to catch one brown trout? (p.136)
- What do you think might have happened to Satch’s father’s watch? (p.138)
- What is the difference between justice and revenge? Which one do you think best describes the plan Matt and his friends have come up with? (p.139)
- If you were described as ‘resilient’, what would that mean? Do you think you are resilient? Give an example. (p.141)
- What was Maddy afraid of in the dark? Why was her fear unrealistic? (p.144)
- What does ‘submerged’ mean? (p.153)
- What does the author mean by ‘Cam’s body language indicated suspicion’? (p.155)
- What is a cygnet? (p.157)



- What is a 'territorial'? (p.159)
- What is abseiling? Is this something you have ever done? How did you feel about it – before, and after? (p.160)
- In this chapter Maddy and Matt had an opportunity to find out a lot more about each other. Do you think they were surprised by what they found? Now that they understand each other better, do you think they could be friends? (p.167)
- What was Matt's plan to stop Elsa getting caught on Cam's hook? Do you think it will work? (p.169)
- What does the phrase 'assumed obedience' mean? (p.170)
- After talking to Satch, Matt starts to wonder if his plan is still okay. Do you think he should go ahead with it? Why? (p.171)
- When Satch came to tell them the phone had been found, what had he intended to come and tell them anyway? Who do you think the other camper would be who found the phone? (p.175)
- What is a trench? Why did Mr Klineck want them to dig them around the tents? (p.178)
- Something else Matt and his friends didn't think of has happened that will affect their plan. What is the likely consequence if Cam uses the dead possum to catch Elsa? (p.179)
- What was Maddy's plan to get back at Cam? Why did Matt say it wouldn't work? (p.181)
- What is insomnia? Have you ever had it? Matt has a sudden change of heart. What was it and why did he change his mind? How is he feeling about the punishment now? (pp.182-183)
- What do Matt and Paul unexpectedly find when they get to the waterfall? What do they guess is the reason? (pp.184-185)
- How did Matt know Satch was a policeman? Why do you think Satch hadn't told him that earlier? (p.186)
- Why had Satch's opinion of Munn changed from earlier in the story? Would you have volunteered to stay, as Paul did? What does 'I need to brief Munn' mean? What did Satch predict would happen next? (pp.188-189)
- What does Azura notice that was so different in their surroundings? (p.190)
- What happens in Matt's body when he realises what is happening out on the lake. Do you have reactions like that when you get scared or worried? (p.191)
- What saved Cam from being killed by Maddy? Describe the way Cam entered the water. (p.195)
- What is Cam most in danger from now? Do you think it's possible to stop panicking? How would you do that? (pp.196-197)
- What does it mean to be 'foul-hooked'? What is Matt weighing up in his mind in order to make a decision about what to do next? (p.198)
- What is Matt's plan to free Elsa? Why can't he use Cam's knife? What does Cam want to happen to Elsa? (pp.202-203)
- What happened immediately after the waterfall turned to flowing mud? What was Munn doing? (p.204)
- What did Matt do to help Cam breathe? Why is Cam not able to help them get to shore? Where do they find a safe space to get out of the water? (pp.208-209)
- What state is Cam in when Matt gets him onto? What does Matt do to take care of him? Do you think Cam deserves such tender care? (pp.210-211)
- Who comes to rescue Matt and Cam? Where do the rescuers take Matt and Cam? (pp.212-213)
- Why does Matt now view what he did as revenge and not justice? Do you agree with him? (p.215)
- Why doesn't Matt tell Satch about the pocket knife? Who does Matt blame for Elsa's death? (p.217)
- What does 'kia kaha' mean? How did Maddy escape the water? Was her reaction to what happened surprising? (pp.218-219)
- Do you think Matt deserves to be called a 'hero'? Does he? Have you ever been called a hero? (pp.120-121)
- Matt has a physical reaction when he thinks he sees Elsa's body. Can you describe what happens in his body? How is he feeling? (p.223)
- What does Matt find? How does he get it free? (pp.224-225)
- What events came together to enable Matt to find the watch? (p.226)
- Why does Matt think Elsa recognises him? What does Matt give Elsa in exchange for the watch? Why does he call her an 'ungrateful thing'? (pp.228-229)
- Who is waiting for Matt when they return to school? Do you think all of Matt's problems are over now that everyone thinks he's a hero? (p.233)
- What was the story that Paul, Matt and Azura had come up with on the bus? Why did they make it up? (p.234)
- Who came up to see Matt that weekend? What decision was made about Matt's future while they were there? (p.236)
- What is a 'calamity'? (p.237)
- How much does the watch cost to fix? Why did the watchmaker not charge Matt? (pp.238-240)
- What burst on Tuesday morning? Who ruined things for Matt? Were you surprised? Do you think what Sharon did was fair? (p.241)



- Why was Matt worried about the police investigating the theft? (p.243)
- How does Nana respond when Matt tells her about going back to the house? (pp.245)
- What clues does Matt have about who stole the old lady's money? (pp.246-247)
- What clue does Cam's brother give Matt about who the thief was? Does it prove who the thief is? (p.251)
- Who is waiting to speak with Matt in the office? Why doesn't Matt need his Nana to come? What evidence does the policeman have that Matt is the thief? (pp.254-255)
- Who do you think is coming to speak at the assembly? Do you think it's going to be good or bad for Matt? (pp.259-261)
- What is Satch's reaction when Matt gives him the watch? Are you surprised he reacted this way? (p.267)
- What is an 'Epilogue'? Why didn't Matt return to live with his family in Hastings? (p.267)
- What does Satch do to help Brayden? (p.268)
- What happened to Elsa? (p.269)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1:

The setting in *Sunken Forest* is a real place. Using the Department of Conservation website, <http://www.doc.govt.nz/waikaremoana>, ask students to find three pictures or facts that support the way the lake and its surroundings were described in the book. Can they find pictures or facts that show parts of the setting descriptions were fictional?

Create a chart collating the facts and the fictional elements of the setting descriptions.

ACTIVITY 2: COME TO LAKE WAIKAREMOANA

Using the information from the Department of Conservation website and other online resources, ask the students to design a poster advertising Lake Waikaremoana as a holiday or school camp destination. Ask them to include the leisure activities available and also the unusual geography and history of the lake.

ACTIVITY 3: JUSTICE VS REVENGE

Ask the students to describe the difference between justice and revenge. In the story, Matt is understandably angry with Cam. Do the students consider his response to be just, or revengeful? If you have a number on both sides, divide the class into two groups: those who think he wanted justice, and those who think he wanted revenge. Ask each group to discuss the reasons for their decision and then support the students in a debate. Can they convince other students to agree with their group?

Alternatively, ask them to think of a time when they've been very angry with someone else. When they consider their response, ask them to try and differentiate if they wanted (or got) revenge or justice. Ask if anyone will share an example, or share one from your own childhood, and as a class decide if it involved justice or revenge.

ACTIVITY 4: NATURAL DISASTER

Reread pages 91-92 and ask the students to create a flow diagram of the sequence of events that led to the forest being at the bottom of the lake. They could do it with pen and paper, or explore and use a digital tool, e.g. www.draw.io.

ACTIVITY 5: THIRD PERSON AND FIRST PERSON

Sunken Forest is written in the third person, from the perspective of a narrator. Ask the student to choose one scene from the story to rewrite in the first-person perspective of one of the characters. You might need to model this to the class first by perhaps retelling the scene of the altercation between Maddy and Cam on the lake from Maddy's perspective.

ACTIVITY 6: THE EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF NEW ZEALAND

On page 91 the author describes New Zealand as 'a country that is still growing'. Ask the students which two natural forces are working against each other to change the landscape of New Zealand. Show the students other examples of changes in landscapes from earthquakes and erosion. Share the National Geographic video 'Earthquakes 101': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7ho6z32yyo>.

As a group, list the ways in which erosion could occur, e.g. rain, waves, salinisation, living organisms, gravity, temperature, wind etc.

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