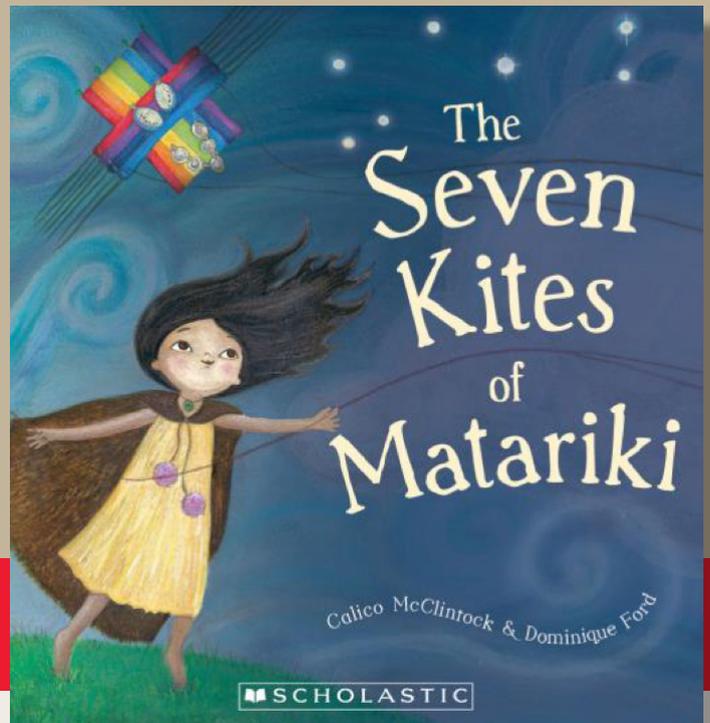


The Seven Kites of Matariki

By Calico McClintock
Illustrated by Dominique Ford

- Reading • Writing • Maori
- Science • Art



Synopsis

The Seven Kites of Matariki is a story that imagines why the stars in the cluster called Matariki can be seen in an early morning sky, low on an eastern horizon. It is mid-winter in a Maori village. Seven sisters are preparing for the new year by following a long-held tradition of making and flying kites. This year is the first year that the youngest sister, Ururangi, has been old enough to make her own kite. The sisters make their kites from different materials. Each kite is a different colour and has eyes made from a different kind of shell. Ururangi's rainbow kite uses all the colours and has glistening, iridescent paua eyes.

The sisters take their kites to a hill where they can catch a warm easterly wind. On the way, the six older sisters argue, each girl claiming that her kite will fly the highest. When they arrive, however, the sisters find there is no wind, and their kites will not fly at all. Disappointed, the girls tie up their kites, pull their cloaks around themselves, and rest under Grandfather Puriri. As night begins to fall, they are soon fast asleep.

The early-morning dew moistens the wings of the kites, making them supple and ready to fly. Then the wind rises. It pulls and tugs at the kites, undoing their strings and carrying them up into the sky. The sleeping sisters are unaware of what has happened. Then little Ururangi dreams of the wind asking the kites to play and of the kites wanting to escape with the wind. She wakes up and sees that her kite is gone. Her cries wake her sisters, who are alarmed to find their own kites missing. They spot the kites far away on the horizon. The second sister tells the others not to worry, reassuring them that their kites are not misplaced but can be likened to the stars seen in the east at the beginning of each new year. Only Ururangi is sad, because her kite, the seventh kite is missing. Her sisters are hungry and head for home, leaving Ururangi on the hill, where in the clear morning sky she discovers for herself all seven stars in the cluster called Matariki.

About the Author

Calico McClintock is a writer and designer based in Whangarei Heads with her husband. She has previously self-published her books *The Lamentations of Te Whara*, *Maori Willow* and *Kumara Mash Forever*. Her works reflect her interest in Maori stories and story telling. *The Seven Kites of Matariki* is no exception.

About the Illustrator

Dominique Ford is an artist and illustrator living in rural Tauranga with her husband, Andrew, and her teenage children. Dominique started out in graphic design but has now illustrated several picture books, including *Moonrabbit* (Penguin), *The Song of Kauri* and this year's title *The Seven Kites of Matariki*. As well as drawing, Dominique knits, crochets, sews, makes jewellery and collects cats.

Writing Style

The Seven Kites of Matariki is a modern, made-up story. Like traditional myths it tells a story to explain a recurring natural phenomenon. However, because this story was created recently, it is not a traditional myth that has been passed down from one generation to the next.

The narrative is told in the mythic style of traditional storytellers. It is written in the past tense and tells the story in chronological order, beginning with the phrase, 'Long, long ago'. The tone is warm and expressive – it is easy to imagine children listening in rapt attention as a beloved teacher or family member recounts the tale.

The author, writing as Calico McClintock, includes some lovely examples of figurative language in her writing. For example: 'Wake up! Wake up! puffed the east wind as the branches of Grandfather Puriri shook.' The story itself remains easy for young students to comprehend.

Those who know something of the significance and history of Matariki and of the astronomical basis to the celebrations will gain more from the story as allusions are made but not always explained. Readers are not told, for example, that the reason the sisters see the stars at dawn is because Matariki traditionally occurs when the seven stars of the Pleiades reappear in the night sky in mid-Winter. They are seen rising in the north-eastern sky just before dawn.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

If your own knowledge of Matariki is hazy, some basic research would be beneficial. Talk to Maori people in your community who might be able to inform you of their own beliefs and practices.

Also, see www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/assets/LanguageResources/MatarikiBooklet.pdf for a general overview. Another useful website is www.wicked.org.nz/Themes/Themes-gallery/Matariki.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What is Matariki? What might kites have to do with Matariki?
- Look at the picture. What sort of book do you think this will be? Will it be a true story or fiction? Will it be an ancient myth or a modern myth? Why do you think this?
- When does this story take place? What seems old-fashioned about this picture? What seems modern? (p.3)
- What are laughing creeks? Why didn't the author just call them loud creeks? What sort of atmosphere does the phrase 'laughing creeks' evoke? (p.3)
- Where do the sisters live? (pp.4–5)
- What tradition do they follow every year? Why is this year special? (pp.4–5)
- What do the two eldest sisters make their kites out of? What connection might this have with the dark green images around the edges of the page? (pp.6–7)
- What do the first six sisters' kites have in common? In what ways are they different? Which kite would you most like to fly? Why? (pp.6–11)
- What is special about the kite made by Ururangi, the seventh sister? (pp.12–13)
- Look at the clothing worn by each of the seven sisters? What do their clothes have in common? In what ways is each sister unique? (pp.6–13)
- Why might the sisters want to go where the warm wind from the east blows? In what order do the sisters walk? Where is Ururangi? (pp.14–15)
- What do the first six sisters argue about? Why do you think Ururangi did not join in? (pp.16–17)
- Why might the illustrator have shown the sisters in shadow in this picture? Why do you think she only showed us Ururangi's face? (pp.16–17)
- Why were the sisters tired and disappointed? (pp.18–19)
- Who is Grandfather Puriri? Have you ever seen a puriri tree? What was it like? (pp.18–19)
- What does the author mean when she says, '... a crescent moon came up over the hill and slipped between the leaves and the branches of Grandfather Puriri'? Was the moon actually in the tree? (p.20)
- What does 'supple' mean? Why might being supple help a kite to fly and not break? (p.21)
- What happened to the kites? Why didn't the sisters do anything about it? (pp.22–23)
- What do you think the swirls in the picture are? Whose kite has flown the furthest? (pp.22–23)
- What did Ururangi dream? Did the kites really want to escape? If kites could really think, do you think they would want to escape? Why? (pp.24–25)
- What is a 'horizon'? Why were the kites tiny? (pp.26–27)
- Why did the illustrator include a line of yellow between the sea and the sky? (pp.26–27)
- Why are the kites dark in this picture with just a bit of colour in the lower kites? (pp.28–29)
- What does the second sister say to make her sisters feel better? (pp.28–29)
- Why were the first six sisters rushing home? Why doesn't Ururangi rush home? (pp.30–31)
- What did Ururangi see, all by herself? (pp.30–31)



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: WHO ARE THE SEVEN SISTERS?

Show the students an image of the actual Seven Sisters (e.g. <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap150617.html>) and explain that there are, in fact, many more than seven stars in this cluster, but that humans can only see six, or sometimes seven, of these stars with the naked eye.

Ask why the author might have chosen exactly seven sisters for this story. Explain that in some versions of an ancient Greek myth, seven sisters are chased by a hunter called Orion. To protect them, the god Zeus changes them into doves, and they fly up into the sky, becoming stars. These stars are the Pleiades, otherwise known as the Seven Sisters.

Discuss how different cultures often have different myths explaining the same natural phenomenon. Elicit that the author of *The Seven Kites of Matariki* has created her own modern myth, weaving in aspects of Maori culture and Greek myth.

Assist the students in planning and writing their own myth based on these seven stars. They may wish to have seven sisters, seven brothers, or seven creatures of some kind. Help them plan a storyline that results in seven stars appearing in sky.

When the students have planned, drafted and written their stories, allow them to share them with one another.

ACTIVITY 2: A GLOBAL EXPLORATION

Discuss how the Pleiades, or the stars of Matariki, have been important to more than just the peoples of the Greek and Maori cultures. If students from other cultures have knowledge of how the Pleiades are important to their culture, allow them to tell the class.

Divide the students into groups, and ask each group to prepare a short presentation on the significance of the Pleiades to a particular culture. These could include Maori, ancient Greek, Chinese, Celtic, Hawaiian, Hindu and different Native American cultures, as well as others.

Note: A group of interested students might like to research the Pleiades from an astronomical perspective instead, adding another dimension to this assignment.

Model the skills of skimming and scanning, so that the groups can take effective notes. Then assist them in safely finding information from the Internet or library reference materials. Provide time for the groups to prepare their presentations, including creating visual aides, such as pictures or diagrams.

After the groups have given their presentations, discuss any themes or threads of interest that arose.

ACTIVITY 3: MAKE MANU AUTE, OR MAORI KITES

The Seven Kites of Matariki can be used as an introduction to a study of Maori kites. Depending on the time and resources available, you could either create real kites or make life-size kites from cardboard.

First, show students examples of different Maori kites using both the book and images from the Internet. Use the images to initiate a discussion on what your students already know.

Then, if possible, arrange for a local expert to talk to the students. You can also share the information about the kites from websites such as www.teara.govt.nz/en/kites-and-manu-tukutuku/page-1 and <http://nzbirds.com/birds/maorikites.html> in a form that is suitable for your class. If your school is near Auckland War Memorial Museum, you could arrange a visit to see actual Maori kites (check that they are currently on display when planning your trip).

If you are making cardboard kites, encourage the students to create differently shaped and coloured kites just as the seven sisters did in the book. It may help to create a class chart of the different materials, shapes and colours used to make the kites in the story. The students could attach real shells, feathers and leaves to their kites.

If you are creating real kites, it may be easier if the students work in groups and all make the same kind of kite. Be sure to attempt to fly the finished kites in a place far from trees and overhead wires. Choose a windy, but not stormy, day.

Allow time for the students to present their kites to the class, and display the finished products in a suitable location.

Written by Mary Atkinson