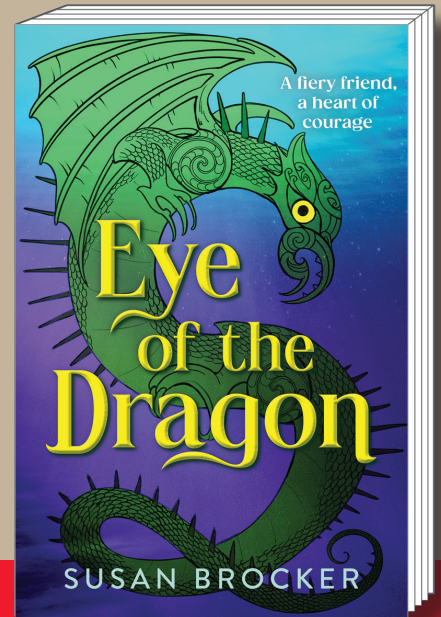


Eye of the Dragon

By Susan Brocker

Cover illustrated by Isobel Joy Te Aho-White



- Reading • Writing • Art • Māori
- Mythical Creatures • Friendship

Synopsis

Bullied at school about his stutter, and feeling ignored at home by his mum, stepdad and stepsister, Peter takes off to the beach with the family dog, Lucy. The dog begins barking outside a cave. Bold enough to investigate, Peter discovers an injured dragon. He is frightened at first, but something about the dragon's eye reassures him and invites him to come closer. A friendship is sparked. Determined to help the dragon in the cave, Peter confides in his friend Huhana, who, to his surprise, doesn't dismiss his dragon as make-believe, and tells him about Māori taniwha, some of which were believed to act as protective guardians. The dragon flies Peter to visit his estranged father, and he learns about the accident that caused his stutter.

As Peter gains confidence throughout the story, with the help of Huhana and Puff, he stands up to the bullies, and helps uncover an illegal logging operation that threatens the town. As his confidence builds, he loses his stutter and his need for the dragon dwindles.

The author shares that the story was inspired by the song 'Puff the Magic Dragon', about a boy who invents a magical dragon, but as he grows up the dragon slips away. The reader is left wondering whether this magical dragon was ever real ... or just a figment of Peter's imagination.

About the Author

Susan Brocker has written over 50 fiction and non-fiction books for older children and teens, which have been published worldwide. She has a history degree and a love of social history that is reflected in her books. Susan also has a close affinity with animals. She lives with her husband and many pets in a lovely old villa on a small farm near Tauranga. Other Scholastic titles by Susan include *1914 Riding into War*, *Ice and Caged* for older readers and picture books based on true NZ animal tales; *Bess the Brave War Horse*, *Friday the Rebel Dog*, *Mrs Chippy the Cat*, *Pelorus Jack the Dolphin Guide* and *Watson the Detective Dog*.

Writing Style

Eye of the Dragon is a 120-page novel written for the 8+ age group. It's the first in a series showing how animals (in this book an imaginary one) can help children cope with challenges in their lives. The book is written in third person past tense. The author explores the themes of bullying, courage, imaginary friends and friendship to help Thomas, the main character, overcome his stuttering. Susan's love of animals is evident in the special friendship that Thomas and his dog Lucy shared throughout the story. Lucy is Thomas's faithful and dependable furry companion. His one and only friend in town is Huhana, a kind and loyal Māori girl who attended the same school.

The book, which is divided into 17 lively chapters, starts with a brief explanation on page 2 about how the famous song 'Puff the Magic Dragon' inspired the tale. The dragon in the story has a heart of courage and ends up giving Thomas the courage to stand up to the bullies at school, as well as an adult who bullied some of the children and other adults in the town. The realistic fiction text is woven with passages of descriptive fantasy text, which allows the author to leave the readers wondering whether this magical dragon was real or just a figment of Thomas's imagination. After all, many people believe taniwha are dragon-like guardians who protect the land and people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Proficient readers ask and answer questions about the characters and events in a book to help them make sense of what they read. They make predictions, inferences and connections. During the shared sessions, use some of the questions provided to help promote discussion. Encourage the students to draw on their own personal experiences and prior knowledge of bullying, friendships and taniwha.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

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

- Do the words 'fiery friend' and 'heart of courage' match the illustration on the front cover? Why or why not?
- Are dragons found only in stories?
- Looking at the cover illustration, what might make you think this story is about a 'dragon' from Aotearoa New Zealand?
- Why would Thomas want to keep Puff a secret? Would you have done the same?

COMPREHENSION:

- Read the information at the top of page 2. Have you heard the song 'Puff the Magic Dragon' before? (p.2)
- Why do you think Thomas hides away in his bedroom? (p.5)
- Why did Thomas's stutter get worse when he was around his father? Do you know anyone who has a stutter? How does he or she cope with stuttering? How do you help him or her? (p.6)
- Why might the stutter have come on after Thomas's accident? (p.6)
- Why do you think Thomas took his dog Lucy for a walk? Does going for a walk help clear your head if you're worried about something? Why or why not? (p.6)
- Why do you think that Thomas had never learnt to swim? What did the author mean when she said that the surging water had nearly dragged him down forever? (p.7)
- Why would bailing up a seal be dangerous? (p.8)
- What does it mean when dogs raise their hackles? (p.8)
- Why did the creature bare its sharp fangs but not snap? (p.10)
- Why do you think Thomas stuttered when he spoke to people but not when he spoke to animals? What does this tell you about how Thomas feels about animals? (p.11)
- Thomas felt sick inside during his swimming lessons. Do you get nervous when you go to lessons that you don't like? Explain your answer. (p.14)
- Thomas ignored Eddie the bully when he teased him. Have you ignored a bully? How did that go? (p.14)
- Why did Thomas hardly stutter when he spoke with his friend Huhana? (p.15)
- Mr Fisher stuttered on purpose when he gave instructions to Thomas and winked at the other children. What does this tell you about what type of person Mr Fisher is? What did that behaviour show Eddie and his friends? (p.15)
- How did Thomas feel, being compared to his father who was a talented swimmer? (p.16)
- What could you do if a person was bullying you or talking to you like Mr Fisher spoke to Thomas? Do you agree with Huhana when she said that Thomas needed to tell someone about Mr Fisher? Why or why not? (p.18)



- Lucy had always loved Huhana. Dogs are known to sense things like emotions. How might Lucy react if she met Thomas's bullies? (p.21)
- What challenges might there be when children from two different families (who are now part of a blended family) have to live together? (p.23)
- Rawiri and George tried to get Eddie to give Thomas the scalpel back. What does this tell you about them? (p.26)
- Have you ever heard the song 'Puff the Magic Dragon' that Thomas sang? Have you ever read a book that has been inspired by something else? Elaborate on your answer. (p.28)
- Often parents will sing to their children at night to relax them and help them go to sleep. How might Thomas's singing have helped the creature? (p.28)
- Thomas's stutter wasn't so bad when he talked to Huhana, sang songs and was helping the creature. Why do you think this was? (p.29)
- Why did Thomas compare Lucy to an agility dog? Have you seen an experienced agility dog in action? What kind of tasks do they do? (p.32)
- Why might the surgical instruments have looked spotless? (p.33)
- If someone from the school had overheard Thomas and Huhana's conversation about operating on the dragon, what might they have thought? Explain your answer. (p.34)
- Huhana said that the creature was in Thomas's head. Why might Huhana have believed him previously and now said that he was making it up? (p.34)
- Do you think that Huhana thought that Thomas finding the creature and his bullying were connected? Explain your answer. (p.34)
- Have you ever fed a starving animal before? If so, how did it make you feel to do that? (p.37)
- Thomas wasn't worried about Eddie and his phone. Who should he have been worried about since he was skipping school? (p.37)
- Why do you think Thomas didn't care where Eddie's phone had gone? Do you think he was beginning to feel braver and stand up to Eddie? Why or why not? (p.37)
- What does the word 'claustrophobia' mean? How might Huhana react if she entered the deep, dark cave? (p.39)
- Do you think Thomas will keep his side of the promise and ask for help with the bullying? Why or why not? (p.42)
- Do you think Thomas was a wuss? Explain your answer. (p.43)
- Thomas and Huhana didn't think any adult would believe them about the taniwha. Do you think this was true? Why or why not? (p.44)
- Why might Eddie feel a need to be in control and be powerful? (p.44)
- Why did Thomas start stuttering again in woodwork class? (p.46)
- How might Thomas have felt about the woodwork teacher's response and lack of support when he asked if he could stay near him? (p.46)
- Why did the noise of the drill nearly send Thomas flying for the door? (p.47)
- Huhana imagined that she was related to the Māori princess Hinemoa. Why might people imagine things sometimes? (pp.48–49)
- Why did the author compare Eddie's phone with a hand grenade? (p.55)
- What steps could Thomas have taken when he received the two different bullying text messages? Has this happened to you? What action did you take? (p.55)
- What is a 'kingmaker'? If you're unsure, look up its meaning in the dictionary. (p.58)
- Eddie walked into Mrs Chen's office with his head lowered and didn't look at Thomas and Mrs Chen. What does this tell you about how Eddie really felt about himself? (p.61)
- Why might Eddie have been scared when Mrs Chen suggested that she phone his parents? (p.62)
- Read the chapter heading on page 64. What is a 'smoke screen'? Look it up in a dictionary if you're unsure. What smoke screen might the author be referring to? (p.64)
- Has something such as stuttering ever stopped you from standing up in front of class? How did that make you feel? (p.65)
- Do you know any other examples of how people have been persecuted? (p.66)
- The principal shut the school down for the afternoon because of the scorching hot temperatures. Do you think this might happen more in the future? Explain your answer. (p.67)
- Why was it that when Thomas talked to Puff, Eddie and the other boys couldn't see who he was talking to? Why did they think that Thomas was a nutter? (pp.70–71)
- Who or what do you think caused the tall tussock grasses behind Thomas to burst into flames? Was it Puff, or could something else have caused the fire? (p.71)
- Did Thomas actually put the embers out with the heaps of sand? Explain your answer. (p.71)
- Why do you think Huhana had never met Puff? (p.72)
- Huhana said the more people who know about the bullying the better. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? (p.74)
- Stacey thought it was best to ask Thomas what he wanted. What do you think of her advice? (p.75)



- Given the context of the text, what do you think the saying 'Forewarned is forearmed' means? Research it on the Internet if you're unsure. (pp.77–78)
- Noah didn't want to push Thomas into the water because he knew that Thomas couldn't swim. Why did Noah and Rawiri need to stand up against Eddie's request? (p.82)
- When Thomas had fallen overboard, he thought his dad saved him, but his dad felt that he'd actually put his life at risk by not putting him in a lifejacket. How can attitude and the way you look at things that happen in your lives affect you? (p.90)
- Thomas stopped in his tracks when he saw the cover of the dinosaur book. Why did that take him by surprise? (p.90)
- Eddie's life in his foster home horrified Thomas. How might it have helped Thomas to know some background to Eddie's home life? (p.94)
- Leo and Tim joined forces to try to stop Fisher and his illegal logging operation. How is this a mature way to act? (p.95)
- What is a 'kickback'? Look it up in the dictionary if you're unsure. (p.99)
- What do you think Thomas was going to tell Mrs Chen in her office? (p.100)
- Is bullying someone ever just 'harmless fun'? Explain your answer. (p.102)
- The massive logs, woody debris and mud crashed down the hillsides and caused so much damage. Something similar happened in New Zealand in 2023. How can forestry companies be made to change their actions? (pp.107–108)
- Did Puff change the river's course or was it nature and its power? (p.108)
- How can a crisis bring out the best (and sometimes the worst) in people? (p.110)
- Eddie took his anger about his foster family out on Thomas. How else could Eddie have handled his situation? (p.111)
- How can having someone say that they believe in you change how you feel about yourself? (p.111)
- How would you feel if someone sang a song in honour of your bravery like Huhana did for Thomas? (p.114)
- Mr Donald Fisher got angry when he was losing the discussion and thumped his fist on the table. How else could he have acted to prevent his frustration turning to anger and a violent act? (p.117)
- Why had Puff disappeared from the cave by the end of the story? Did Thomas need her help after the meeting at the council room? Explain your answer. (pp.119–120)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: THE TOWN'S TANIWHA

Huhana told Thomas that bad taniwha sometimes catch people and eat them, but that good taniwha can act like guardians and help protect people. Imagine that the town had its own good taniwha. Give your taniwha a name and write a brief description of what it looks like. Then write five things that the taniwha could do to help prevent the town getting damaged by debris from forestry operations. Work alone or in pairs.

ACTIVITY 2: PAPER HEARTS

Thomas felt sad about his stutter, and it was made worse when Eddie and his gang bullied him about it. Their hurtful words and actions made Thomas feel bad. Choose some different excerpts from the book and read them aloud to the class. Encourage the students to indicate when the characters' words were hurtful or kind. A great visual way to do this is by using paper hearts. Give a heart made out of colourful paper to each student. Have them crumple up the paper heart when they hear something hurtful, mean or negative. Then also have them smooth out their paper heart when they hear something kind, encouraging or positive. Explain that bullying can be invisible and can cause irreversible damage to a person who is being bullied.

ACTIVITY 3: AN IMAGINARY FRIEND

Puff was an imaginary dragon who helped Thomas cope with challenges in his life, such as having a stutter and being bullied by Eddie and his mates. Children often use imaginary friendships as a safe haven, and these friendships will usually fade away over time. Imagine that you could create your own imaginary friend. Describe what it would look like and how it would help you overcome a challenge in your life. For instance, it might be a magical dolphin who helps you feel more confident when you're learning to swim because you have a phobia of water.

ACTIVITY 4: INSPIRED BY...

The author of *Eye of the Dragon* was inspired by the song 'Puff the Magic Dragon'. Children's authors often write books that are inspired by something in their everyday lives. Roald Dahl, for instance, wrote books that were often inspired by experiences in his childhood. When he was a child, a famous chocolate maker used to bring chocolate bars to his school for all the children to taste-test. Young Roald used to dream that he would invent a new chocolate bar one day. It's no surprise that he went on to write *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Think of an everyday event that happened to you recently. Write down the event that inspired you and how it could be turned into a fiction story. Write the plot (a brief outline) of your story using bullet points. Think of and plan out the beginning, the middle and the end of the story.

ACTIVITY 5: SING A SONG

Listen to the 'Puff the Magic Dragon' song on the Internet. Write the words on the board for everyone to see and practise singing it in small groups or as a whole class. You could also add dance movements to the song. Then perform the song to the other groups in the class, to another class or during the school assembly.

Written by Janine Scott