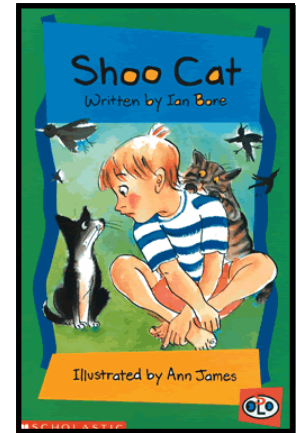


TEACHER'S BOOK NOTES

Shoo Cat (Solo fiction)

Written by Ian Bone

Illustrated by Ann James



The author

Ian Bone is a rapidly rising star in the world of children's books. Born in Geelong, Victoria, in 1956, he studied to be a teacher before attending the Australian Film and TV School. After graduating in 1982 he worked as a children's television producer for the ABC, where, he says, he could 'exercise his silly sense of humour and make national television programs'. Many of these programs — among them *Play School*, *Swap Shop*, and *Finders Keepers*, the dramatisation of Emily Rodda's book of the same name — went on to win national and international awards. Ian also produced two music albums for the ABC: *There's a Bear in There*, and *Rose's Lullaby*.

He first started writing stories for one of the TV shows he was producing, *Swap Shop*. 'Instantly,' he says, 'I fell in love with the form. In TV there are a lot of people who produce the end product. With a book, you are closer to your reader.' *The Swap Shop Book*, which he co-authored, was published by ABC Books in 1989, and in the same year Ian moved from Sydney to Adelaide.

In 1993 Ian left the ABC to concentrate on writing children's books. Since then he has worked as a freelance scriptwriter (his television work includes several scripts for *Bananas in Pyjamas* and *The Wiggles*) and has had many books for younger and older children published. Some of his best known books are *Spy Babies*, *Winning Back Dad* and *Pimplehead and Curly* (for Middle and Upper Primary readers) and *Tin Soldiers*, *Fat Boy Saves World* and *The Song of an Innocent Bystander* (all for young adults). *The Song of an Innocent Bystander* was been short-listed for the CBCA's 2003 Book of the Year: Older Readers. Ian has also written a title for the Omnibus Solo fiction range: *Maddy in the Middle*, which was a CBCA Notable Book in 2002.

Ian is married, with three children, and lives in Adelaide.

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The illustrator

Ann James is one of Australia's best-known illustrators of children's books. Her signature artwork, with its lovely loose lines, vivid colours and impish sense of humour, has enchanted children for more than twenty years.

Ann was born in Melbourne in 1952. She trained as an arts and crafts teacher, and after teaching art in secondary schools, she worked as a designer and illustrator of educational books to support her freelance work as an illustrator. Her first picture book, *A Pet for Mrs Arbuckle* (Gwenda Smyth), was published in 1980, and since then she has collaborated with authors such as Robin Klein (the *Penny Pollard* books), Gillian Rubinstein (*Dog In, Cat Out*), Libby Gleeson (*Skating on Sand, Hannah Plus One* and *Hannah and the Tomorrow Room*), Margaret Wild (*The Midnight Gang* and *The Midnight Feast*) Jeri Kroll (*A Coat of Cats*) and many others. She has also written and illustrated two books of her own: *Finding Jack* and *One Day*. Her most recent picture book, *Shutting the Chooks In* by Libby Gleeson, was released by Scholastic Press in February 2003.

In 1988 Ann and her partner Ann Haddon established Books Illustrated, a Melbourne gallery and shop specialising in children's book illustration. Ann has also pioneered a newsletter (*Sobi-It*) designed specially for illustrators, and maintains an illustrator file to introduce publishers to the many talented artists working in the field of children's book illustration. The two Anns worked together on *Making Pictures: Techniques for Illustrating Children's Books*, which aims to demystify techniques and give inspiration to illustrators of all ages and levels of ability. In 2000 they were jointly awarded the Pixie O'Harris Award for their services to Australian children's literature.

Ann James is perhaps best known for her ability to capture the characters of animals in her illustrations. Her own pets feature in many of her books (for example, Spud in *Dog Star* is her dog Ollie, a springer spaniel cross; and the stray cat in *Shoo Cat* is based on her cat Mac, who went missing for eight months before coming home again). Cats, dogs, chooks, crocodiles, elephants, birds and butterflies bounce through the pages, rendered in every conceivable medium — watercolour, ink, collage, chalk, pastel, gouache. Always innovative, Ann approaches each of her projects with a fresh eye, and the results are sometimes surprising but always brilliant.

Shoo Cat is Ann's third Solo. The others are *Dog Star*, by Janeen Brian, and *Elephant's Lunch*, by Kate Walker.

Shoo Cat

The story of *Shoo Cat* is based on a real incident. Ian Bone's sister-in-law told him of a cat who simply walked into her home and ate her cat's food. The incident made Ian think about what sort of cat would do this. Where would such a cat live? Who (if anyone) looked after it? It's the first time, he says, that he has based a story on a real-life event.

Shoo Cat tells how a stray cat constantly runs into Matt's home and eats up the food left over by his own cat, Pudding. Matt's dad is intent on banishing the unwelcome cat, to the extent of dressing up Matt as a dog and creating a cat scarecrow — a 'scarecat' from a mop. But Matt is sorry for the cat.

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He sees its sadness and loneliness.

He thought about plump Pudding, who always had plenty of food, and someone to love her.

"I'd feel sad if I was alone," said Matt.

"You're not alone," said Dad. "You've got me and Pudding."

Matt enters only reluctantly into Dad's schemes for getting rid of the cat. Surely there is some way that Dad will accept it? As it happens, plump Pudding is no good at all at scaring the cheeky birds away from Dad's vegetable seedlings. But the stray cat is a different story — the birds fly away, and they don't come back. 'Shoo' now has a name, and a job. Dad warns Matt that 'He's not part of the family — yet', but it seems that Shoo's future is assured.

Notes for teachers

Shoo Cat presents a number of themes, including:

- Belonging (the concept of a family unit, and each member's part in this)
- Not belonging (being excluded from the group; alienation)
- Sharing
- Kindness to others
- Homelessness.

All of these ideas might be talked about in class, and could even, perhaps, with older children, trigger discussions about the refugee question in this country.

Talk about the text

- In the story, why does Dad want the stray cat to go away?
- Why does Matt feel sorry for the stray cat? Do you feel sorry for it?
- Why does Dad finally agree that the cat may stay?
- Is Shoo a good name for the stray cat in the story? What name would you have given the cat?
- If a stray cat came to *your* home, would you feed it? Would you let it into your house? Why, or why not?

On a higher level...

- It's easy to feel sorry for an animal that is lost, or homeless, or hungry. How do we feel about people who are homeless and hungry?
- There are lots of stray cats like Shoo that need a good home. Talk about this problem. If appropriate or possible, organise a class excursion to an animal shelter.
- Talk about the need to be a responsible pet owner.

In class

- Dad uses a mop to make a scarecat. Using any materials at hand, create your own scarecat! Or draw a really scary scarecat, instead.
- Dad dresses Matt to look like a dog. The costume doesn't work very well. Think of ways to make a better dog costume.
- Make up a play based on the story of Shoo. Present it to the class.

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