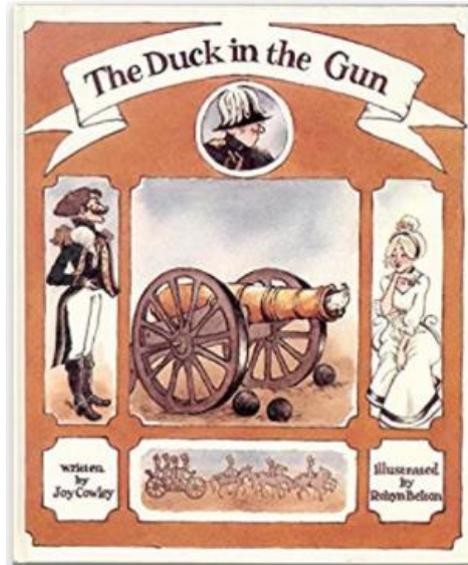


PUKAPUKA TĀWHIRI

The Duck in the Gun by Joy Cowley Original Publication 1969



Pukapuka Tāwhiri refers to books that keep calling us back – books that we’ve connected with in the past and continue to emotionally resonate with us. What is it about these books that stick in our heads? Whether the fires of interest are stoked through connections with characters, through particularly vivid imagery, or through exciting themes of magic or mysticism, once burning they can energize us for a future of reading for pleasure. A lifetime of reading is a lifetime of placing ourselves in others’ shoes and a lifetime of learning about people whose lives are different to us. These emotional connections developed through reading occur at a neurological level, but the effects span to a societal one, as they teach us how to develop empathy and understand others.

When reading, think about how this book ignites your interest, or doesn’t. Why does it continue to sit on Aotearoa’s bookshelf decades after it was first published? In exploring the themes and characters of *The Duck and the Gun*, we can find many different elements that readers might resonate with. The major themes are: **friendship, duty, and war.**

Discuss the historical context of the story.

Joy Cowley wrote this as a protest to the Vietnam war after she received letters from her cousin describing the awful conditions of warfare. About 3000 New Zealanders were involved in the Vietnam war, waged between the communist North and republic South in the late 1960s and early 70s. People back home protested as the anti-war movement grew in the early 70s.

More info here:

https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/vietnam-war_

https://teara.govt.nz/en/asian-conflicts/page-5_

Themes in *The Duck and the Gun*:

Theme one: relationships

- The soldiers arrive in the town and immediately point their gun towards the village. However, due to a series of events, the general goes into the village to visit the Prime Minister and his daughter who live there.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. How does the relationship between the general and the Prime Minister change throughout the book?
2. How did the soldiers feel about the village at the start and at the end of the book? Why didn't they want to destroy it?
3. Why did the soldiers and general keep feeding the duck?

Theme two: War

- They came to this village to wage war however, due to the duck, they have to delay the fighting.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. What was the soldiers' attitudes towards war at the start and the end of the book? Have their attitudes changed?
2. Are we told where the story is set? Why/why not and what is the effect of this?
3. How do you feel about the outcome of the story? What is another way the story could have ended?
4. How does this book make you feel about war?

After Reading: Beyond the Book:

Create a broader discussion surrounding this book and readership.

Possible questions/discussion points:

1. This book was published over five decades ago, yet it remains a well-known and classic New Zealand book. Why do you think this book has persisted, whereas others have not? Is this book unique?
2. Can you think of any more recent books that remind you of *The Duck and the Gun*? How do they differ?

3. How did you find the illustrations in the book? How did they aid the meaning of the story? Is there any illustration that stuck out to you?
4. How did the book make you feel?
5. Did you like the book? Was there something that stuck out to you?
6. What kind of books do you normally like? What is it about these books that call to you? For example, vivid imagery, or characters that you find relatable.
7. Do you think we should read this book over more modern ones? What is the continuing value of traditional books?