

## ***A Present from Pudding***

**By Elsie Locke**

In the dark of the night Kylie sat up in bed, wide awake, listening to something. What was it? Her parents were asleep. The house was quiet, and the street outside was quiet too, with no cars passing.

The only sound was right there in her own room, a very soft sound, a purring sound.

'Pudding!' Kylie said. "How did you get in?"

Her darling cat purred louder, and that was no answer at all.

Pudding was always put outside at night. And the bedroom door was shut. As for the window, only the top part was open and Pudding had never jumped through there before. It was much too high. But this time she must have done it.

Kylie drew back the curtain so that the light from the street lamp came in.

Pudding rolled over to be stroked and petted, and then – she started to squeak!

"Pudding, what are you up to?" said Kylie. "First you get through a window that's much too high. And everybody knows that cats don't squeak!"

Pudding answered with a long, loud purr. But the squeaking went on, too.

Something else must be making the squeaks.

Was it a kitten? Pudding didn't have any kittens. Had she stolen one from another cat?

Kylie felt all round the bed. Her hand came down on something warm and furry. No, it wasn't furry! It was fluffy, and it had hard feet and a hard bill.

"Pudding!" said Kylie in wonder. "You've brought me a duckling!"

She held it up to the light. Yes, it was a wild duckling from the river, all brown and yellow. Pudding was purring louder than ever because she was so pleased with herself, and the duckling was squeaking all the time.

"It's very kind of you, Pudding," said Kylie, "but what ever can I do with a duckling? I can't take it to bed like a teddy bear. And I can't take it back to the river in the dark, either."

Then she had an idea.

Kylie went tiptoe to the laundry and ran some water into the tub. She put a small wooden box in the water, and then she put the duckling on it. Now it could swim or stand on the box just as it liked, but it couldn't get out. After that she gave Pudding a cuddle, and put her outside, and went back to bed.

Kylie woke again at the first glimmer of morning. Nobody else was awake. She got dressed and went to the laundry. The duckling began a long string of squeaks, just as the ducklings did on the river when they were parted from their mothers.

Kylie picked it up and talked to it softly. Then she went outside with the duckling and walked down to the river.

When she got there she could see two broods of ducklings. Kylie wondered if a duck would know this was one of her own children, after it had been away all night.

The first duck had twelve ducklings. Pudding's duckling never stopped its squeaking, but the mother duck took no notice.

The other brood had seven ducklings and they were on the far side of the river. But this time the duck lifted her head and the duckling squeaked a little faster. Kylie guessed that this was the right family. She let the duckling slide out of her hand into the water. Away it went with its little feet going flat out, while its mother swam over to welcome it home.

How pretty it looked on the shining river!

Kylie danced her way back to the house. She could hardly wait to tell her own father and mother. Nothing so special had ever happened to her before. She was proud of Pudding for being so clever.

Her mother was bringing in the morning paper. "Where did you get to?" she said, surprised.

Her father looked through the window, laughing. "What got you up so early?" he said.

Kylie tried to tell them, but she was so excited that the story didn't come out very well. And then - they didn't believe her.

"You'll be writing books one day if you can make up stories like that," Dad said.

"Pudding couldn't jump through that high window," Mum said.

"Anyway, if she caught a duckling, she'd kill it."

"She didn't even hurt it," Kylie said. "It swam away as fast as fast."

"You tell us the story, Pudding," joked Dad.

But all Pudding would do was open a lazy eye, as if she would never dream of jumping through a high window with a duckling in her mouth.

Kylie went to school feeling angry. Grown-ups were hopeless.

Something special had happened to her and she wanted to tell the world, but they wouldn't believe her. If she talked about it at news time, the teacher would say she had a great imagination. Well then, she would make it a secret.

But a secret has to be told to somebody, so she told her friends Lisa and Karen.

Lisa said, "Why did Pudding do it?"

And Karen said, "I know! Pudding loves you, and she wanted to bring you a present!"

Could this be true?

The next night, Kylie dreamed she was at the netball tournament with all the teams mixed up together. She was looking frantically for the duckling so she could get it back to the river. And she couldn't find it, or Pudding either.

Suddenly Kylie woke up. Pudding was purring loudly, but she wasn't on the bed. She was stretched out on the floor and the duckling was walking over her. The same duckling? Or a different one?

It wasn't the least bit afraid of the cat. Kylie took it to the tub, and gave Pudding a cuddle and put her outside, and went back to bed, and woke very early all over again.

This time she was going to make sure they believed her.

The duckling was squeaking loudly as she took it into the front bedroom and held it close to her father's ear. Dad sat up with a jerk, half asleep and half awake.

"What's got in here?" he cried. "What's going on?"

"It's only a duckling, Dad," Kylie said. "Pudding brought it, just like yesterday."

"By all that's wonderful," said Dad, "it is a duckling!"

Mum woke up too. "Where's Pudding, then?" she asked.

"I put her outside," said Kylie, "after she brought the duckling."

Dad came over to the river and watched how Kylie gave the duckling back to its own family.

By now he was so excited that *he* wanted to tell the world.

He told the neighbours, and the people at work, and he rang up the teacher so that she would know it was true.

Kylie told the story to the class and they all drew pictures of cats and ducks and ducklings. She felt very special all day, because of the special thing that had happened to her.

That night Kylie went to bed early. She was sure that Pudding would wake her with yet another duckling. And she was right.

Altogether seven times over seven nights did Pudding bring in a duckling, before they grew too big for her to carry. And every morning, Kylie took the duckling back to the river.

Why did Pudding do it? Was she pretending the ducklings were kittens, because she had never had a kitten of her own?

Or had Karen guessed the true reason – that Pudding brought the ducklings as a present, out of love?

"You silly Pudding," said Kylie, stroking the deep, soft fur.

"Why don't you bring me a present I can keep?"

But Pudding only purred on, as loud as loud could be.

*This is a true story. Pudding was a real cat who lived by the Avon River in Christchurch, and she really did bring seven ducklings home.*

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### Overview

Kylie's cat, Pudding, brings her such an unusual present that even Kylie's parents don't believe her when she tells them about it. But proof is provided as Pudding continues to present Kylie with wild ducklings on a nightly basis. This true story will delight its audience.

### Features to Consider in Context

The features outlined below could constitute either supports or challenges for individual readers.

- The recount form of this true story
- The question form of many of the main character's thoughts: "What was that?", "Was it a kitten?", "Why did she do it? Was Karen right? ..."
- Illustrations that convey the main ideas in the text
- The use of complex sentence structures, for example, "Yes, it was a wild duckling from the river, all brown and yellow."

### Readability

Noun frequency level: 7–8 years  
Suggested level: 7.5–8.5 years

### Supports and Challenges

The aspects outlined below could constitute either supports or challenges for individual readers.

- Familiarity with the recount form
- Many students will have seen cats bringing prey inside.
- The vocabulary of the text is within the reading experience of students at this level.
- Words that some students may find challenging: "laundry", "wondered", "jerk", "amazement"
- The concepts of "creek" and "a string of squeaks" may prove challenging for some students.

### Introducing Students to the Text

- Before distributing the Journals, discuss the title. "Who could Pudding be?" "What kind of present might a cat bring home?"
- "Have any of you had experience of a cat or dog bringing something home?" Give the students the opportunity to share their experiences in pairs.
- Hand out the Journals and allow the students the opportunity to preview the illustrations and discover what the present is.
- Alert the students to the variety of punctuation used and ask them to read along with you while you read out loud the first three paragraphs to "How did *you* get in?"
- Set a purpose for the reading. Suggest that the students read on to "but what am I going to do with a duckling?" and make predictions about what Kylie will do with the duckling.

### During the Reading

- Chart the students' predictions.
- Ask the students to read to " 'You'll be writing books one day if you can make up stories like that,' said Dad." Check the students' predictions.
- "How does Kylie convince her parents that Pudding did bring her the duckling?"
- "Read to the end of the story and find out what happens."

### After the Reading: Responding to the Text

Possible focuses for discussion

- "What makes this story special?"
- "Why didn't Kylie's parents believe her?"
- Ask the students to reflect on the questions that Kylie asks herself about Pudding near the end: "Why did she do it? Was Karen right? Was Pudding bringing Kylie presents to show how much she loved her?" Get the students to share their opinions with a partner.

- Ask the students to reread the paragraph that begins “Kylie picked it up and talked to it softly ...”, in which Kylie takes the first duckling back to the creek. Get them to think about what Kylie might be saying to the duckling and then to work in pairs to share what their conversations would have been with the duckling.

## Suggested Activities

You could select from the follow-up activities below. You may need to work with the group for some of these activities.

Suggested Achievement Objectives	Learning Outcomes <i>Students will be able to:</i>	Learning Experiences <i>Students could:</i>
Close Reading Using Texts • exploring language	• read aloud, using the common conventions of writing.	• in pairs, choose and rehearse their favourite part of this recount to read to their partner, noting the purpose of any punctuation.
Poetic Writing • thinking critically • exploring language	• record personal experiences, shaping ideas to recount events.	• write their own true story about an experience with a pet, theirs or someone else’s, that shows some aspect of the animal’s behaviour.
Expressive Writing Interpersonal Listening and Speaking Using Texts • thinking critically	• identify and express meaning informally and then to an audience.	• in pairs, use the paragraph “Kylie tried to tell her, but she was so excited, the story didn’t come out very well” to re-enact the conversation that Kylie had with her mother. Act out this conversation for the group or the class.

## Links with Other *School Journal* Titles

“An Egg Story” 1.1.88; “Cat Talk” 3.1.90; “Catty Tricks” 3.1.90; “A Cat Door for Percy” *Junior Journal* 8; “Purring” 1.4.97; “Quiet Night” 1.4.95; “The Tiger” *Junior Journal* 21; “Trick Cat” 1.3.95; “When Puhi Died” 2.2.96; “The Show Cat” 1.2.88; “The Secret Nest” 1.1.89

## School Journal Catalogue Categories

Animal Behaviour  
Cats  
Ducks  
Pets

## Cross-curricular Links

Science: Making Sense of the Living World  
Arts: Drama

## Associated Websites

All about Ducks for Kids – everything you want to know about ducks  
<http://www.kiddyhouse.com/Farm/ducks.html>  
Pet Care – caring for your pets  
[http://www.hsus.org/programs/companion/pet\\_care/pet\\_care.html](http://www.hsus.org/programs/companion/pet_care/pet_care.html)