

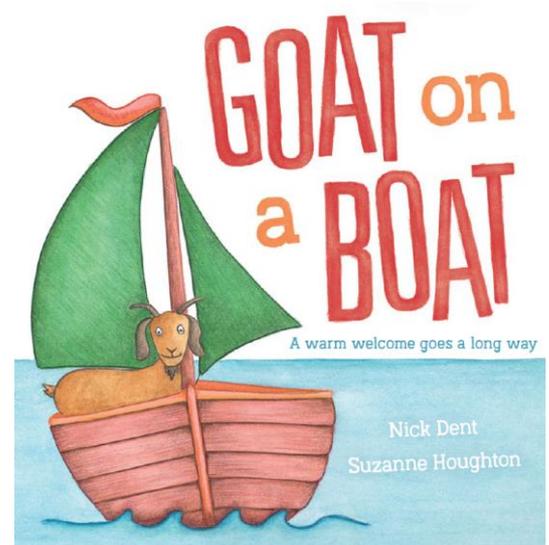
Goat on a Boat

Author

Nick Dent

Illustrator

Suzanne Houghton



Synopsis

The island of Joxx is a harsh place, and the flock of sheep who live there struggle to find enough to eat, so when a boat arrives bearing a goat, it is no surprise that the sheep are worried that there won't be enough food for them and the new arrival as well. Bighorn Bill takes an outspoken stance, recommending that the goat be sent away immediately, while Fleecy Jean advocates for kindness, saying that the goat has the same right to share the sparse grasses as the sheep do. The debate is heating up when Goat does something entirely unexpected. He climbs the rocks to the top of the hillside, and the surprised and nervous sheep, led by Fleecy Jean, follow him up to a place that they have never been before. And there, at the summit of the forbidding and rocky island, the goat (and his following of sheep) discover a field that is rich with fodder. Suddenly the flock has gone from the edge of starvation to having a surfeit of tasty plants available for the eating. From that day on the attitude of the sheep of Joxx changes, and instead of worrying that the island can't adequately support new arrivals, they wait for them in excitement, wondering what new thing they might learn from the next immigrant.

About the Author

Nick Dent is an entertainment journalist, film critic and editor. He was the weekly Sunday film critic for News Ltd newspapers in five cities for five years. Nick has written thousands of articles on entertainment topics during his journalism career and was the former editor of *Time Out Sydney*, and currently occupies a senior management role in *Time Out* as special projects director. As a relatively recent parent, he has reconnected with the world of children's books.

About the Illustrator

Suzanne Houghton has spent most of her life with paint in her hair and on her clothes. She has always had a passion for fine art and after completing a degree in Graphic Design, she found herself returning to her first love, art. With growing children and more time to do what she loves, Suzanne focused her passion on illustrating picture books.

Themes

Sharing; exclusion; prejudice; fear; immigration; friendship; acceptance of others; understanding; discovery; bravery; and wonder.

Writing Style

Written entirely in verse, *Goat on a Boat* is written in the third person throughout, and variously follows the viewpoints of Bighorn Bill, Fleecy Jean, and the flock as a whole. The narrative structure is straightforward, with the action being chronologically ordered, and the authorial voice consistently sitting at a remove from the main events. The story is well suited for reading aloud to the target audience, with a catchy rhyme scheme, stereotypical animal characters, and vocabulary choices challenging enough to spark conversations between the youthful audience and the adult who is reading it aloud to them.

Illustration Style

Rendered in a palette of soft-toned natural hues, Houghton's artwork brings the characters and setting of Dent's verses to life. Comprising vignettes, single pages, and double page spreads, the figures and backgrounds are coloured with soft gradations in tone. Subtle shading gives the artwork a three dimensionality that contrasts with the frequent use of white space outlining and enhancing the foreground artwork. The faces of the animals are expressive, and the scenery is believably realistic. The visual narrative parallels and expands upon the textual narrative throughout, depicting both the events described within the text, and some of the expressed thoughts and predictions of the characters which fail to eventuate. With endearing sheep and a goat, and a clearly idyllic meadow at the top of the hillside, Houghton's artwork complements and enhances Dent's cautionary and encouraging tale on multiple levels.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class discuss the cover and title of the book. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What does the picture on the front cover show?
 - What does the picture on the back cover show?
 - Based on the pictures and the title, what do you think might happen in this story?
 - Who do you think the main characters of the story might be?
 - What would you like to see happen in this book?
- 2) On the inside front page, it says that the story is 'A fable by Nick Dent'. As a class, discuss what a fable is, and how it differs from any other story. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
 - What is a fable?
 - What other fables do you know of?
 - How can we tell if a story is a fable, or an ordinary story?
 - Why do people write fables?
 - What are some good points of fables?
 - What usually happens in a fable?
- 3) The title of *Goat on a Boat* rhymes. As a class write some other rhyming titles for stories using the format (Animal) on a/an (Object). How many different titles can your class invent? Choose your favourite title from the list that your class has thought up, and create a book cover for this title. You can create an artwork for just the front cover, or for a challenge you can create a back cover as well and include a blurb to entice readers to read the story!

- 4) Write a short story that fits the cover and blurb you created in exercise 3 above. For a challenge you can try writing it in verse inspired by the rhymes in *Goat on a Boat!*
- 5) What do you think would have happened to the sheep if they had put the goat back on his boat and sent him away? Create a two-panel artwork with the first panel showing the lives of the sheep on the island of Joxx now that Goat has shown them the way to the hilltop grasslands, and the second panel showing what their lives would be like if they had never let him leave the boat.
- 6) Experiment with painting techniques to create a picture of a beautiful hilltop meadow populated with happy sheep.
 - On a large piece of paper dab several blobs of different shades of green finger paint, and use your hands to cover the page in the different greens, blending them together and creating a variety of tones. You can use a paintbrush, twig, or leaves to give your background extra texture if you wish.
 - After your grassy background has dried, create brightly coloured flowers in your meadow. You can dab lots of little dots of different colours on the grass using a toothpick or the end of a paintbrush, or you can try different splattering and spraying techniques.
 - Once your flowers are dry, create some sheep to live in your meadow. Cut their faces and legs out of brown or white card, and make their bodies from cotton wool. Glue your finished sheep to your painting.
 - Use your artworks to create a class wall display, or put them in the hallway for the whole school to admire.
- 7) Act out the story of *Goat on a Boat* for another class or at an assembly.
- 8) What other fables, fairytales, and stories does your class know which feature either goats or sheep? What fables do you know that star another farmyard animal?
- 9) Look at the pictures in the rest of the story, and as a class discuss the different animals that arrive on the island in boats.
 - What animals can you see arriving?
 - Goat taught the sheep to climb rocks and find the hilltop meadow, what new and interesting things do you envision the other animals teaching the sheep?
 - What would you like to teach the sheep if you were to visit their island?
 - Draw a picture illustrating your ideas of what the different animals might share with the sheep.
 - Caption your picture clearly with both the animal and the skill it is teaching.
- 10) Goat arrives alone in a small red boat with green sails, but near the end of the book animals are arriving in a variety of different boats.
 - As a class discuss which boat you think looks the nicest and why.
 - Online, or in the library, research what boats like this are called, and how they work.
 - Individually, draw a design for a boat of your own, and present your boat and its features to your class in a short speech.

- 11) Fold paper boats and have a paper boat race across a puddle, or a plastic tub full of water.
- 12) All the animals in the story arrive safely, travelling across a calm sea, but in real life waves can be large and storms can be dangerous to small boats. As a class discuss why someone might leave their home and travel in a small boat across the ocean to another country. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
- What are some of the dangers that can threaten small boats at sea?
 - What can happen to a little boat in a storm?
 - How do you think it must feel to get in a small boat that is about to travel across the ocean?
 - Why might people risk their lives like this?
 - What sort of things might be happening in their homeland for them to risk travelling like this?
 - What do you think they are hoping to find on the other side of the ocean?
 - Are they likely to be welcomed the way goat was by Fleecy Jean, or the way Bighorn Bill reacted to him?
 - In the story, everyone benefited when they welcomed the boats and new creatures to their island. How do you think real countries should treat new arrivals?
- 13) Arriving in a new place can be scary. As a class, discuss some of the things that you can say to new arrivals in your community to help them feel welcomed and happy. Make a class list of all the welcoming phrases you can think of, and in pairs, choose some of them to showcase in an illustrated poster.
- 14) Look carefully at the very last page of the story. What colours can you see in the sunset picture? Using this picture for inspiration, experiment with using watercolour paints, watercolour pencils, or chalk pastels to create a sunset picture of your own.