

## Teacher's Notes

### *Subbie and His Mate*

Author: Corinne Fenton

Illustrator: Mark Wilson

Publisher: Ford Street Publishing 2022

*'Every morning Subbie would wait at the gate for Graham, and every morning they would talk. Subbie's eyes watched Graham wherever he went and, whenever he could, he followed.'*

#### **About the Author**

Corinne Fenton writes picture books about animals whose lives have touched our hearts. Many of her picture books have been shortlisted or won awards and three have been chosen as themes for the Myer Christmas windows.

Corinne has spent time as the Assistant Regional Advisor for the Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators in Australia and as a judge for the Dorothea Mackellar poetry competition.

In her picture books, Corinne introduces us to animals who have a special place in Australian history. This is one of them.

Web: <https://corinnefenton.com/>

#### **About the Illustrator**

Mark Wilson is a multiple award-winning author/illustrator with 23 books in print worldwide in 14 languages. Mark grew up with a love of comics, drawing, rock music, Australian history and endangered species - exploring most of these themes through his writing, illustrating, paintings and workshops.

Mark has won seven Australian National Fine Art awards, five Whitley Awards for children's literature, nine CBCA Awards, four Wilderness Society Awards and the 3<sup>rd</sup> C. J. Picture Book International Award. Mark was also presented with the 2011 Dromkeen Medal for Services to Children's Literature. Mark hopes his books and workshops encourage students to study their own family and local history, as well as native species and conservation.

Web: <https://markwilson.com.au/>

## Themes

Love	Devotion	Special bonds
Kindness	Faith	Friendship
Hope	Respect	Determination
Persistence	Loyalty	Resilience
Trust	Teamwork	

## Author's Inspiration for the Story

*Subbie and His Mate* was one of those stories Corinne just had to write.

On 13<sup>th</sup> August 2019 Corinne looked up Salisbury in the white pages and found Graham, asking him if anyone else had enquired about writing a picture book about his beloved horse. The answer was 'no'.

Corinne met with Graham and Subbie a week later and again in September 2019. Graham talked, Corinne listened and Subbie listened too.

On her second visit Corinne read them both an early draft while she fed Subbie carrots. She still has that draft with fading carrot juice dribbled over it.

Corinne kept researching, writing, and working out the best way to write their story. She planned to visit schools, hospitals and the children's hospice with them both in January 2020, imagining Subbie's float pulling up in front of her house.

But then came Covid and she had to be content with regular phone conversations with Graham.

She happened to ring one Saturday afternoon in the middle of winter and learned that Graham was in hospital. Graham passed away later that afternoon.

Ten weeks later, on a Saturday, at exactly the same time, Subbie joined his best mate.

We hope this book is one way Subbie and Graham will be remembered forever, and for those who never had the privilege of meeting them, a way for them to meet.

The greatest wish with this book is for the world to know what this horse and this man did – know of the joy and happiness, the smiles they brought to the faces of the young and not so young, those sick kids they gifted special moments to carry with them forever. And what they did for horse racing.

So many who knew them say there has never been a greater bond between a man and his horse.

## Suggestions for Discussion

- Subbie won the 1992 Melbourne Cup, but it is what he achieved with his best mate Graham which is the theme of this story. What did they do?
- On Cup Day 2022, it will be 30 years since Subbie won the Melbourne Cup. Think of ways you, your class or school can celebrate this.
- What important job did Subbie do with Graham when he first retired from horseracing?
- What did Subbie and Graham do when they visited schools?
- What special tricks did Subbie do?
- How did people feel when Subbie and Graham visited them in nursing homes and retirement villages?
- What famous people did Subbie and Graham meet?
- What job does a Clerk of the Course and his horse do?
- What colour horses are most popular as Clerk of the Course horses and why?
- What job does a jockey do? How do they train? What age do they start training?
- What cheeky things did Subbie do?
- Why do you think Subbie and Graham loved each other so much?
- Graham taught Subbie to go into very small spaces like hospital rooms to visit patients. Why was Graham able to do this?
- What overseas country did Subbie and Graham fly to in March 2000 and why?
- Do you have a pet? Have you ever read her/him a story?

## Activities

- Can you draw a horse like Subbie?
- Subbie and Graham had a special bond. Can you write 2 or 3 sentences about a special bond you have with an animal or friend.
- Corinne Fenton visited Subbie and Graham as part of her research to write this story. Can you write a story about an animal and a special person you know? Eg. Maybe a neighbour, relative or friend has a special relationship with an animal.
- Corinne Fenton believes animals know much more than we give them credit for. Do you agree?
- Looking at Mark Wilson's illustration on page 3 – can you name three books which you think would be a good story to read to an animal?
- What type of book is ***Subbie and His Mate*** and where would you find it in your library?
- Animals, like humans, do not live forever. The important thing is that we take care of our animals and give them wonderful lives. Although Subbie and Graham both died in 2020, memories of what they did and all the people they helped, are very much alive. Write a paragraph of why it's important to take care of and respect animals.
- What is the Melbourne Cup? What other grand horse races are there in the world?
- Can you write a review of the book and send it to:  
Corinne Fenton or Mark Wilson  
c/o Ford Street Publishing, 162 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford, Vic. 3067.

### Illustration Notes

I use a lot of photos of Subbie for each illustration, of which there are many, including Corinne's own photos of Subbie at his home. I watched films of Subbie to study how he walked, bowed and galloped, particularly how Subbie and Graham interacted.

I sketched from these photos and films, finding different angles, never directly copying, but using them to make sure that all the detail in the illustrations is as realistic as possible – for instance, Subbie's long thin nose. I draw different angles. Sometimes it's a long shot, then perhaps a view from above, a ground-level angle, then a close-up, then a long shot - so Subbie is small in the overall picture. Many people do this when making documentaries or movies, for variety, to keep the viewer engaged. I approach picture books the same way.

### Visual Literacy

**Activity:** Examine the images; angles, lighting, detail and movement. Compare them to the text and discuss their emotional power and how they relate to that text.

**Question:** The **colours** generally used in this book vary greatly from page to page. Discuss how effective this is and how the colour influences your interpretation of this work?

**Activity:** Students look at photos of Subbie and do their own drawing from one.

**Discussion Point:** The **layout of the book** contains some double-page spreads and some single spreads. Sketches and framed images are inset throughout. Discuss how this influences your reading of the book and how effective this 'style' is.

**Activity:** Students design their own poster 'promoting' the book.

**Discussion point:** The illustration on pages 8-9 shows Subbie racing in the Melbourne Cup. How has Mark made Subbie look as if he is galloping fast (answer - blurry legs and background and soft outlines)?

**Discussion point:** The **cover** is the most important part of a book. Look at the front cover of *Subbie and His Mate* and discuss why Mark may have chosen this image and how effective it is in making you want to pick the book up and read it.

**Activity:** Create a short graphic novel version of a scene or situation in the book. Read other such books as a guide to style and approach.

**Activity:** Create a short play depicting a scene from the book. This could include painting a backdrop of the crowd, costumes and 'props', or use of digital images projected onto the wall behind the actors.

**Activity:** research music and songs depicting horse racing (but check age-appropriate-ness first.) Eg. George Jones – *The Race is on*, The Hollies – *Stewball*, Chris de Burg – *The Ballad of Thunder Gulch*. Discuss the imagery and lyrics, and then select two or three to be the theme music for activity no. 4.

**Activity:** Students design their own cover for the book.

## **Online Resources**

Corinne Fenton's Website: <https://corinnefenton.com/>

Mark Wilson's Website: <https://markwilson.com.au/>

Ford Street Publishing's Website: <https://fordstreetpublishing.com/>

Subbie winning the Melbourne Cup in 1992:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GA8yRaMrT-E>

WHEN YOUR BEST FRIEND IS A RACEHORSE | Subzero:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZkLLuSGZKM>

You Tube World Horse Racing WORLD'S KINDEST HORSE Subzero:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-Ufu3Bkj7Y>

SUBZERO'S DAY OUT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCmgIS5GBI4> YouTube .

## **Photographs Online**

[https://www.pinterest.com.au/search/pins/?rs=ac&len=2&q=subzero%20racehorse&eq=Subzero%2C%20Racehorse&etslf=20423&term meta\]=subzero%7Cautocomplete%7C0&ter](https://www.pinterest.com.au/search/pins/?rs=ac&len=2&q=subzero%20racehorse&eq=Subzero%2C%20Racehorse&etslf=20423&term%5Bmeta%5D=subzero%7Cautocomplete%7C0&ter)

## **Reference Book**

*Subzero: More than a Melbourne Cup Hero* by Adam Crettenden.

**More of Corinne Fenton's picture books about animals**

*To the Bridge* – Illustrated by Andrew McLean (Walker Books Australia)

*A Cat Called Trim* – Illustrated by Craig Smith (Allen and Unwin)

*My Friend Tertius* – Illustrated by Owen Swan (Allen and Unwin)

*Bob the Railway Dog* – Illustrated by Andrew McLean (Black Dog Books/Walker Books Australia)

*The Dog on the Tuckerbox* – Illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe (Black Dog Books/Walker Books Australia)

*Little Dog and the Christmas Wish* – Illustrated by Robin Cowcher (Black Dog Books/Walker Books Australia)

*Little Dog and the Summer Holiday* – Illustrated by Robin Cowcher (Black Dog Books/Walker Books Australia)

*Chasing Shadows* – Illustrated by Hannah Sommerville (Ford Street Publishing)

*Scuffle-Nut* – Illustrated by Owen Swan (New Frontier Publishing)

*One Lone Swallow* – Illustrated by Owen Swan (New Frontier Publishing)

**More of Mark Wilson's picture books about animals**

*A New Prayer for the Animals* (Windy Hollow Books)

*Flapper V.C.* (Lothian/Hachette)

*The Afghanistan Pup* (Lothian/Hachette)

*Digger – the Dog Who Went to War* (Lothian/Hachette)

*The Horse Soldier* (Windy Hollow Books)

*Journey of the Sea Turtle* (Lothian/Hachette Australia)

*Little Dolphin* (Windy Hollow)

*Migaloo, the White Whale* (Lothian/Hachette)

*The Little Wooden Horse* (Windy Hollow)

*The Timor Sparrow* (Children's Literature Australia Network)