



Restless Spirit

Te Wairua Whakariuka

by Susan Brocker



Susan Brocker is an experienced writer of children's stories which have been published extensively by educational publishers. In this,  **HarperCollins Publishers** her first novel for young people, Susan demonstrates her ability to captivate and charm young readers with a moving and compelling adventure story set on the volcanic plateau of New Zealand. Built around the legendary Kaimanawa horses, *Restless Spirit* is suited to a wide age range (approximately nine- to fourteen-year-olds) and will appeal equally to boys and girls.

A classroom English unit from

A restless spirit roams the sweeping slopes of the snow-topped volcanoes and the wild tussock country – a wild white Kaimanawa stallion who cannot be tamed.

Story synopsis

A young colt who flees to safety after his family have been brutally killed by helicopter hunters. We learn that his great-grandfather galloped across the burning deserts of Egypt and his mother's ancestors once roamed the windswept hills of Wales. This young colt is a survivor, the restless spirit who will soon grow into a magnificent wild white stallion.

We meet a young teenage girl called Lara. Her mother is working at the Waiouru Army Base. Lara, an Auckland girl, is finding it hard to make friends at school and loathes living in the Desert Road area. She is befriended by Kahu and is fascinated by the two Kaimanawa horses he cares for at home. At school, Kahu hides his intelligence and talent behind a cocky attitude, but as they get to know each other better Lara discovers he is a deep thinker and a very talented carver. Through Kahu, Lara learns that the Kaimanawa wild horses descended from horses that escaped from farms in the area over 140 years ago. They bred with Welsh and Exmoor ponies let loose in the 1870s and some military horses released in 1941, including the great-grandfather of the white stallion.

Kahu and Lara take part in the annual DOC* muster designed to keep the population at 500 horses. Their mission is to try to find and then protect the white stallion from being captured by Tusker, the brutal hunter who killed the stallion's family and later wounded the stallion when he tried to protect his new mare and foal – the two horses that Kahu loves and trains. Their efforts fail and the stallion is captured and cruelly treated by Tusker who tries to break his spirit. With the help of Lara's mother (a photographer), her new boyfriend Barry, and Kahu's father (a tank commander), Kahu and his friends carry out a dangerous mission and free the stallion from Tusker and take it home. The stallion's band of horses is herded to safety on Barry's farm. To ensure the stallion keeps his band in this safe area, the stallion is taken there and tricked into winning a mock battle with Kahu's father's tank as he protects his band. Photographic evidence provided by Lara's mother ensures that Tusker is sent to jail for various crimes. The restless spirit is safe and once again free.

Pre-reading activities – setting the scene

- Using atlases, have students locate the general volcanic plateau area from Turangi to south of Waiouru. Find names and the heights of the three main volcanoes. Locate the Kaimanawa Ranges.

- Using the atlas legend, can the students find out more about this area, eg rainfall, average height, temperatures ...?
- Find out what students know about the Kaimanawa wild horses. Speculate on how they got there. Conduct research at:
 - <http://kaimanawa.homestead.com/history.html>
 - check out research information and breed information links
 - <http://kaimanawahorses.photosite.com/> (slideshow)

During and post-reading activities

- Identify the problems Lara had when shifting schools from Auckland to Waiouru. What caused them? Have any students had similar problems? How did they overcome them?
- Discuss Kahu's attitude to school work. What reasons can the students give for his attitude? Do they think this is typical of boys of his age? Was Lara right to own up to the teacher that the pictures and moko biography were not her own work? Can they find any evidence that suggested the teacher may have had other reasons for awarding such a high mark?
- Introduce the word 'genealogy' as a study of the history of families. Students construct a family tree of the white stallion going back to his great-grandfather.
- Discuss/debate the pros and cons of the DOC* management plan for the Kaimanawa horses, mentioned in the book. What reasons did Barry and Kahu give for disagreeing with the DOC muster control plan? Visit the DOC site at: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/podcover.aspx?id=33494> and have students conduct research. Does this alter the students' opinions? List reasons for and against the DOC plan.
- Talk about the way the author tells the story by having alternate chapters written from the point of view of the stallion and then Kahu and Lara. How did this add to the tension and excitement of the adventure?
- How did students react to the parts of the book where there was cruelty shown to any of the horses? Was this difficult to read? Was it necessary for the story? How did Kahu's methods differ from normal methods of 'breaking in' a horse?
- Invite a representative from the local SPCA or a vet to talk to the class about responsible and humane treatment of all animals – especially pets. Have students draw up an animal rights charter promoting proper treatment of animals.

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* DOC = Department of Conservation