

But Then . . .

The *almost* true story of
an overdue book

By Swapna Haddow

Illustrated by Daron Parton



• Reading • Storytelling • Thinking Skills • Art

Synopsis

A child and their grandfather arrive at the library to return an overdue book. The librarian asks why the book is 293 days overdue and the grandfather begins a long – some might say ‘far-fetched’ – tale of what happened to the book. Apparently, or so the story goes, they had come across a penguin that had dropped their ice cream so to cheer up the penguin, they read the book to them. Then a book-loving seal charged out of the water and took the book into the ocean. The book was bounced around from the seal to an albatross to an owl and then a whale, before finally finding its way back to the penguin, who returned the book – 293 days later – to the child and their grandfather. At the end of the story the librarian suggests that it might be a good idea for the animals to get their own library cards so that they can check out their own books!

About the Author

Swapna Haddow grew up in the UK and wrote her first book at age eight. She wishes she’d kept it, but it seemed like a good idea at the time to trade it for two stickers and a couple of marbles! Her first published book was the award-winning junior novel *Dave Pigeon*, and her first published picture book was *My Dad Is a Grizzly Bear*. She has also written the early reader ‘*Ballet Bunnies*’ series as Swapna Reddy.

Swapna now lives in Dunedin, NZ, with her husband, son and their dog.

About the Illustrator

Daron Parton is an award-winning illustrator who was born in the UK, married a Kiwi and emigrated to New Zealand in 1995. He has worked as an illustrator for over 30 years and his books include the humorous Scholastic titles, *We Saw a Spinosaurus*, *Starfish the Star*, *Stupid Carrots* and *Bedtime is Boring*. Daron has two sons and lives in Hamilton, NZ.

Writing and Illustration Style

But Then . . . is a 24-page picture book written for the 3+ age group. Award-winning author Swapna Haddow uses her creative imagination to transform an everyday task of returning an overdue library book into a far-fetched adventure, helped along by the antics of a penguin, two seals, an albatross, an owl and a whale. The body copy text consists of easy, conversational dialogue between the librarian, Grandad and the animals. Repetitive phrases, exaggeration, suspense and, of course, humour, are expertly woven into this tall tale to turn it into a riotous, rollicking read for young and old alike.

Daron Parton created the illustrations using Adobe Photoshop and mixed media. His fun, quirky illustrations bring the characters to life through a beautiful blend of colour, movement and humour. The type is set in Arima Madurai, with important parts of the story being set in larger type and on a curve. The illustrations are a mixture of full bleed and cameo style.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of the characters and events in the story. Read the book aloud and, if appropriate, have the students read alongside or by themselves. They could easily join in with the repetitive phrase ‘But then . . .’. Use all or some of the following questions for discussion, comprehension checks and making connections with the students’ personal lives and experiences. Ensure that they know what a ‘tall tale’ is and encourage them to think about the characteristics of a tall tale as they read along.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- Read the text under the book’s title. Why do you think the word ‘almost’ under the book’s title is in italic writing? What is an ‘almost true story’? Is it true or false?
- Have you ever returned an overdue book? How did you feel about it being late?
- Look at the small words in the circle design. Why do you think the words ‘Return It’ are important?
- Who do you think the woman is who is holding up the book? How do you think she is feeling?
- Why do you think Grandad and the child are hiding behind the book?
- How would you describe a tall tale?

COMPREHENSION:

- Read the author’s dedication on page 2. Do you think the five-year overdue book might have been the inspiration for this story? Explain your answer. (p.2)
- Look at the expression of the librarian on page 3. Do you think she is happy or slightly annoyed about the overdue book? Why would she feel like that? Has a librarian ever scolded you for having an overdue library book? What was your reason for returning the book late? (p.3)
- Why does Grandad wink at the child? What do you think he might be about to do? The child is smiling. Do you think Grandad might be a bit of a trickster? Does someone in your family or someone you know like to trick people and tell tall tales? Give an example. (p.4)
- The librarian says that the book is 293 days overdue, but Grandad explains that they were on their way to return the book 290 days ago. What do you think might have happened after they met the penguin? (p.5)
- Why does the librarian look surprised? What might she have thought when Grandad said that they met a penguin? (pp.4–5)
- After reading that the penguin had dropped her ice cream, do you think that this story is going to be a true story or a tall tale? Explain your answer. What else could Grandad and the child have done to cheer up the penguin? (p.6)
- Why does the penguin cheer, “Again, again!”? (p.7)
- The author has used the words “But then . . .” to indicate that something is about to happen. These two words help to create suspense and anticipation. Look at the sea in the background. What might happen next? (p.7)
- What do you think the seal is going to do? How is your prediction about what the seal does the same or different to the author’s version? (p.8)
- What do you think the librarian might be thinking about Grandad’s tale now? (p.8)
- How would you have reacted to a seal snatching your library book? Would you have chased the seal on a surfboard? Why or why not? (p.9)
- The author uses the phrase “But then . . .” again and again throughout the book. Do you think it’s a good title for the book? Explain why you think that. What other titles would suit the book? (p.9)



- What do you think is going to happen next in the story? (p.9)
- How does your prediction compare to what the author has written? (p.10)
- The seal brothers wrestle with one another. Have you ever fought with a sibling or a friend in order to get something such as a book or a toy? How did it work out? How would a librarian react to this kind of behaviour in a library? (p.10)
- A tall tale is a story with unbelievable elements. Do you think that hitching a parasail to their surfboards to chase an albatross is a believable or unbelievable scenario? Explain your answer. How would you have encouraged the albatross to return the book to you? (p.11)
- Grandad said they had no choice but to go after the albatross. Do you think they had a choice or had no choice? Explain your answer. (p.11)
- How does the author let you know that the book's adventures are not over yet? (p.11)
- How could the albatross have held the book, turned the pages and flapped his wings at the same time? (p.12)
- Owls are very clever animals. What do you think the owl will do with the book? (p.13)
- Did you guess that the owl had read the book already? If you had been the author, what would you have written about the owl and the book? (p.14)
- Would you ride on a surfboard near a giant-sized whale? Why or why not? (p.14)
- We can't see the librarian, but what do you think her facial expression might be when Grandad tells her that a whale had the book? (p.14)
- What kind of state do you think the library book might be in by now? Do you think the librarian would want the book back in that condition? Why or why not? What might happen if a library book is destroyed or lost? (pp.14–15)
- Where is your favourite reading spot? Explain why that is. (p.16)
- What kind of conversation might the whale-watching tourists have had when they saw the whale with a library book? (p.16)
- What did you think when you read that the ocean loves reading stories? Is that as believable as the animals loving to read books? (p.17)
- The word 'cheeky' is used to describe the seals. What other words could the author have used that mean the same thing (synonyms)? (p.18)
- How did the author speed up the pace of the story? (pp.18–19)
- What do you predict will happen on page 20? Turn the page to find out. (p.19)
- How does your prediction compare to what the author wrote? (p.20)
- Have you ever held onto a library book for ages because you enjoyed it so much? Why do you think that libraries give you a certain amount of time to read a book, such as three weeks? What would happen if everyone had overdue books? (p.20)
- Do you think the penguin read the book again and again during the two hundred and ninety-three days? (p.21)
- When the librarian said "What a story!" do you think she believed Grandad? What else could she have said in response? (p.22)
- Do you think that the animals will get their own library cards now? Explain your answer. (p.23)
- At the end of the story, some of the animals have library books and some have ice blocks or ice creams. How would you have ended the story? Would it be similar or different to the author's ending? Why might the librarian be peeping out from behind the whale? (p.24)



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: “SORRY, IT’S LATE...”

One of the characteristics of a tall tale is that the tale-teller uses a lot of exaggeration. Imagine that a librarian has asked you why you have returned your book so late. As a class, think of some possible answers using the writing device of exaggeration. For instance, “Sorry, it’s late ... a tornado blew through my bedroom window and whipped the book up, up and away.” Or “Sorry, it’s late ... my pet is a turtle, and I didn’t want to read faster than her.” Write all the suggestions on a large sheet of paper or on the board. Let your imaginations run wild! Ensure the students know that these suggestions are just for creative writing time and are not to be used at the library!

ACTIVITY 2: GRANDAD THE TRICKSTER

On page 21, Grandad finally stops explaining to the librarian why the library book is 293 days overdue. The child doesn’t say anything at all. What do you think the child could have said to the librarian, for instance, “Oh gee, Grandad is such a trickster, isn’t he?” Working in pairs, come up with five possible responses the child might have said at the end of page 21, then share them with another pair or the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 3: A LIBRARY CARD

On page 23, the librarian suggested that the animals should check out books with their own library cards in the future. Choose one of the animals from the story and design a library card for them. Make up a name for the library and give the animal a name. For instance, the albatross could be Alfie the Albatross and he belongs to Ocean View Public Library. You could include a catchy phrase on your card, too. Some library cards use catchphrases such as ‘Knowledge is power.’ You could also create a website address for your made-up library, and even a barcode for checking out the books. Look online or in your own library for design inspiration if you need to.

ACTIVITY 4: A POPULAR BOOK

At the end of the story, the librarian remarks that it’s a popular book. Think about what kind of book might be popular for a penguin or one of the other animals. Design a front and back cover for this book. Elements to include in your design are the book’s title, the author’s name, the illustrator’s name and a blurb on the back cover. A blurb briefly describes the book and is supposed to grab the readers’ attention, making them want to read it.

ACTIVITY 5: BUT THEN . . .

The author uses the repetitive phrase ‘But then . . .’ for dramatic effect. The phrase alerts you to the fact that something is going to happen once you turn the page. Imagine that the last two words in the story are ‘But then . . .’ and that the animals have other ideas about how they’re going to get books from the library. In groups, make up a short tale about how they do it. Remember to include the phrase ‘But then . . .’ a few times. Remember to use your voice and body to express different emotions and feelings. For instance, choose a simple physical action, such as putting your hand up to your eyes as if you are seeing something in the distance, when you say the phrase ‘But then...’. Practise retelling your story, then present it to the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 6: RETURN IT!

The circular library stamp design on the front cover of the book is a good reminder to read books, love them and return them. Copy this circular design onto a large piece of paper, then draw your favourite double-page spread from the book inside the blank open book drawing outline. Display your finished work on the classroom wall.

Written by Janine Scott