



What a Hippopota-Mess!

Pat Skene

illustrated by Graham Ross

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About the Book

The poems in this book tell stories of animals and nature, from two sweaty hippos, a smiling lizard and some creepy crawlers to a few tricky dandelions. At the end of each poem, readers find out more information in an interview with a key character or a list of fascinating facts.

About the Author

Pat Skene has eleven rocking chairs, including the one her father gave her when she was two years old. She says that she does her best thinking when she is rocking back and forth. In fact, she wrote the first draft of *What a Hippopota-Mess!* while rocking one night before dinner. Pat was a banker for many years. She loves her new life as a writer of rhymes. Pat lives with her husband in Cobourg, Ontario.

About the Writing

Ideas for stories are all around us, if we take the time to look.

The idea for *Blue Muckles Brown* came from Pat's visit to Alaska and the Yukon. There were so many moose everywhere she looked. Pat began to wonder how they liked living in such a cold climate. And so her imagination went to work thinking about that question. That's how she wrote about Muckles—the moose who didn't like being cold.

Her inspiration for *Smiling Jack* came at the zoo. She was watching the lizards moving around in a big tank. She thought the shape of their mouths made them look like they were smiling and happy all the time. So she named one of them *Smiling Jack*.

In this book, there is also a poem called "My Sleeping Tree." Pat wrote this poem about the cherry tree right outside her writing-room window.

Pat says, "There's no magic in finding ideas for stories. All you have to do is pay attention to what's going on around you in everyday things and let your imagination run free. There's always a story to be told right in front of your nose."

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections**Prereading Ideas**

Some of the topics covered in this book include stories about animals like moose, hippopotami, lizards, dandelions, trees and snakes.

Have the class list some of the things they already know about these subjects.

Ask students how many of these animals they've actually seen? Describe them to the class.

Talk about snakes. Has anyone ever touched a snake? How did it feel—dry or slimy?

Take a poll about dandelions? Are they nasty weeds or spring flowers?

Classroom Discussion Questions

What was your favorite story or poem and why?

How did the author use her imagination to write the story?

What are some of the real facts you learned?

Why wouldn't Muckles the moose eat the "smelly fish and ham" the children offered him?

What's the difference between "deciduous" and "evergreen" trees? List some of each.

Suggested Activities

Form groups and sing verses of “Smiling Jack.” The rhythm in the poem is perfect for “rapping” the story lines.

Discuss the way words rhyme in the stories. Ask students to write a short story or poem in rhyme.

Have the students choose a favorite story or poem and draw a picture of what they saw in their imaginations while reading or listening to the words.

Create a true or false quiz from the list of facts. Some examples could be:

Some lizards can squirt blood from their eyes. (True, page 33)

Oak trees get struck by lightning more than other trees. (True, page 42)

Mukluks are big hairy ferocious animals. (False, page 56)

Otters are part of the skunk family. (True, page 35)

A rattlesnake loves to hear the sound of its own rattles. (False, page 23)

Hippo sweat looks like blood. (True, page 15)

In the artic, sometimes the sun stays out all night. (True, page 55)

The “Aurora Borealis” is a big city in the Yukon. (False, page 56)

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

For wonderful pictures and information about animals and nature, go to the *National Geographic* website for kids at www.kids.nationalgeographic.com.

For more cool stuff—check out the animal facts and pictures at *Canadian Geographic for Kids* at www.cgkids.ca.

Just for the fun of it—enjoy more rollicking rhymes in the following books:

Cat Magic by Loris Lesynski

There Were Monkeys in My Kitchen by Sheree Fitch

Any of the Jillian Jiggs books by Phoebe Gilman

Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers

Monster Lunch

Rhyme Stones

Reviews

“A terrific book for kids...funny and informative. Great to read aloud in a classroom setting. Highly recommended.”

—*CM Magazine*