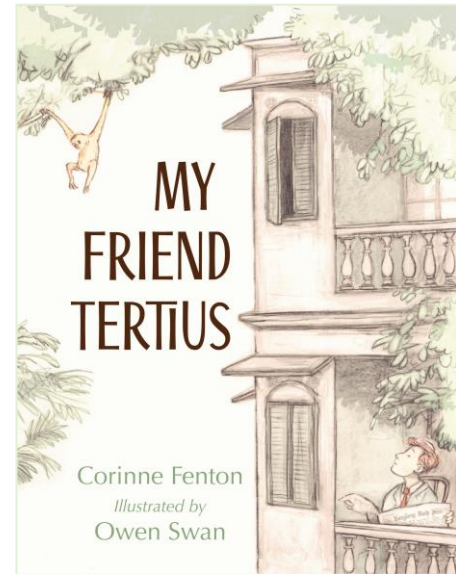


My Friend Tertius

By Corinne Fenton,
illustrated by Owen Swan

March 2017 ISBN 9781760113827 hb



Summary

One question kept echoing in my mind – if I had to leave, what would I do with Tertius?

A true story, *My Friend Tertius* begins in 1941 pre-WW2 Hong Kong. Arthur Cooper, an Englishman working in intelligence for the British Government, rescues a small gibbon in a side-alley market. He calls him Tertius.

Together they travel by ship to pre-fall Singapore, a place which the world believes is impregnable. Tertius and Cooper live amongst increasing danger, bombing raids and destruction and in the days leading up to its fall, Cooper and Tertius flee – on the last destroyer to leave Singapore – to Batavia where they board a steamship which travels to the safety of Perth.

With customs officials and police close on their heels, they travel by train across the Nullarbor to Melbourne – chases and escapes, hide-aways – until finally the police find them. Tertius is housed at the Melbourne Zoo.

The story is a wild adventure, sprinkled with the humour of the antics of a little long-armed gibbon, which offset the dramatic settings and tense situations.

Links to the curriculum

A classroom study of *My Friend Tertius* is relevant to the following Australian Curriculum Learning Areas covering, in general, Year Levels Prep-6 (roughly age levels 5-12):

- English
- Humanities and Social Sciences (History and Geography)
- Science
- The Arts (Visual Arts)

It is also relevant to the following Australian Curriculum General Capabilities:

- Literacy
- ICT (Graphic Design, research)
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Ethical Understanding

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In the classroom...

My Friend Tertius



Themes

- History – World War II, signals intelligence, code-breaking
- Zoos – changes in attitudes over time to housing of animals
- Friendship and devotion
- Love and loyalty
- Animals - gibbons

Language and literature

- Biography – true stories
- Visual literacy – graphic storytelling

Discussion questions and activities

Science/Presentation of information

- Gibbons are the smallest member of the ape family and sometimes called the 'smaller' or 'lesser apes'. What are the names, sizes and characteristics of other apes and where do they live? Design a poster to present your information, using tables, diagrams, images, text and maps.

Mapping

- Tertius and Arthur Cooper travel to many places from Hong Kong to Singapore then on to Perth, Australia, via Batavia by different ships and across the Nullarbor and the southern part of Australia by train. Draw a map and label the places, showing the route they took on their way to Melbourne.

Working for change

- Gibbons' forest habitat in Asia is threatened and one of the gibbon species could be the first ape species to become extinct since pre-historic times. What can you find out about conservation campaigns to help the gibbon?

WWII/Fall of Singapore

- Look at the illustrations on pages 14 and 15. Why is Arthur Cooper hiding under the desk with Tertius? What kind of planes do you see through the window?
- Carry out some research about the fall of Singapore to find out three or four true things about Singapore that are not mentioned in the book. You could present these as a poster display.

Technological change

- Look at the illustration on page 8. Tertius and Arthur Cooper are listening to the 'wireless'. What was a wireless and why was it so important?
- What type of trains were traveling across the southern part of Australia from Perth to Adelaide to Melbourne in the summer of 1942? Can you draw one of the trains?



In the classroom...

My Friend Tertius

English

- In a way, the story of Tertius and Arthur Cooper is a love story: they were devoted to one another. Do you have a pet? What would you do to save your pet?
- On page 21 some children are playing with Tertius. Write a short story on how you think you would feel if you'd been on a ship leaving Singapore during World War II. Would you have liked to meet Tertius?
- Gibbons are very agile. They swing from tree limb to tree limb using only their arms – this method of getting around is called *brachiation*. On page 26 the author says that Tertius was calling, 'Oop, oop,' and somersaulting and tumbling over the seats on the train.' Perhaps you could write a short poem about this.
- Plan and write your own review of the book in at least 150 words, not only to tell others about the story, but to express your opinions about it and the book. Remember that the story isn't only made up of written words, but also various types of pictures, which are also important to discuss.

Ethical understanding

- Tertius and Arthur Cooper were devoted to each other. Do you think Arthur Cooper did the right thing when he made the decision to take Tertius with him to Singapore and then away from Singapore as it was falling? Discuss whether you agree with Arthur's actions.

Related texts/Further reading

Cable, David, (Railfan) *Rails across Australia*, Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2015

Pelusey, Michael and Jane *Our Neighbours - Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei*, Macmillan Library, Macmillan Education Australia P/L, 2004

Bell, Kathrine, *Singapore, Changi and the Burma-Thailand Railway*, Murray David Publishing, 2009

Jackson, Tom, *Nature Watch - Monkeys*, Lorenz Books, Anness Publishing, London. 2002

Websites

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/apes/gibbon/>

The Year of the Gibbon 2015 campaign, set up by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Primate Specialist Group (PSG), Section on Small Apes (SSA)

<http://www.gibbons.asia/year-of-the-gibbon/>

National Railway Museum, Adelaide - <http://www.natrailmuseum.org.au/>

In the classroom...

My Friend Tertius



Notes from the author and illustrator

Corinne Fenton, author

Corinne Fenton is an Australian author for children. She has a passion for picture books and believes they can be read by all ages. She says:

From the moment I learned about Tertius and Arthur Cooper, I could not let their story go. I first heard about how Tertius used to live at the Melbourne Zoo, and then had to research for many years to find the beginning of the story. Many years passed before I discovered that it began in Hong Kong and it was 5 years before I found Arthur Cooper's son, who now lives in England. I found wonderful details of Tertius and Arthur Cooper in the books of the late American writer and journalist, Emily Hahn, who was with Arthur Cooper on the day he bought Tertius.

I found Carola Vecchio, one of Emily Hahn's daughters, who referred me to the Lilly Library in the US which housed her mother's collection of writings and among it I found a letter which Arthur Cooper had written to Emily in 1973. The letter included the most precious photos of Tertius and Arthur Cooper. That was like finding gold.

Research for this story was like searching for pieces of a jig-saw...a very large jig-saw and so many times I almost gave up.

Arthur Cooper was an eccentric, brilliant linguist who also wrote poetry and worked for the Foreign Office in signals intelligence. When in Melbourne he worked as a Vice Consul on Japanese Signals Intelligence which was part of the Diplomatic Code Breaking section.

Gibbons are the smallest member of the ape family and are therefore tail-less. Gibbons have always been difficult to identify because of the colour changes they go through in their development and also because these vary depending from which area they come from. Scientists are now in the process of redefining many gibbon species. Gibbons brachiate – swing from branch to branch – a term call brachiation. Gibbons pair for life and usually live in small family groups.

Other books by Corinne Fenton

Queenie: One Elephant's Story, illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe. 2006.

The Dog on the Tuckerbox, illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe. 2008.

Flame Stands Waiting, illustrated by Sebastian Ciaffaglione, 2010.

Hey Baby! (with photographic illustrations), 2012.

Little Dog and the Christmas Wish, illustrated by Robin Cowcher, 2014.

Chasing Shadows, illustrated by Hannah Sommerville, Ford Street Publishing, 2014.

Bob the Railway Dog, illustrated by Andrew McLean, 2015.

My Friend Tertius is Corinne's first picture book with Allen & Unwin. Except for *Chasing Shadows*, her previous picture books have been published by Black Dog Books, an imprint of Walker Books Australia, and Five Mile Press (*You Have My Heart* and *Counting on You*). Corinne has also published many educational books.

In the classroom...

My Friend Tertius



Owen Swan, illustrator

Owen Swan was born in Sydney and spent most of his childhood in country New South Wales and the Blue Mountains. About illustrating My Friend Tertius he says:

Gibbons

Corinne and I visited the white cheeked gibbon enclosure at Melbourne Zoo together in October 2015 where I made some videos, especially of the smaller gibbon named Vang (although Tertius is most likely a Lar gibbon). YouTube videos were important to get a proper feel for their way of moving – they can appear gangly and awkward but they're really agile natural acrobats with a perfect sense of balance. I collected lots of still pictures from magazines and old educational books, and made sketches of their faces - they look quite innocent but their characters are often wildly playful & mischievous.

Locations

There's a lot of archival film available to get a feel for what British Hong Kong and Singapore looked like in the 1940s. A good source is the British Pathé website which has black & white newsreels, and there are also a few b&w and colour home movies and promotional films on the net. Another reference site I used for stills of 1940s Hong Kong was gwulo.com. The opening image in the book shows a building & rickshaws in a busy business district on Connaught Road. There's some dramatic photos of Singapore prior to & during its fall to Japanese forces on the net, and it was also helpful reading the many first-hand accounts Corinne gave me.

Colour/Character

I looked at old film & photos from the forties for wartime fashion, paying particular attention to location. Popular colours in Australia seemed to be mustard, brown, burgundy, baby blue and navy blue. I used Corinne's precious photos of the real Arthur & Tertius to create the characters of the book, which are more like comic book versions of the same in a similar style to Tintin and Snowy.

Inspiration

The inspiration for the wallpaper & endpapers came from a packet of Chinese cigarettes.

The Japanese Zeros that appear on the page where Tertius and Arthur hide under the desk were partly inspired by the film *Empire of the Sun*, which has a scene showing them flying over panicked civilians in Shanghai.

The Melbourne police uniforms were sourced from photos. The surly officer's face was somewhat inspired by Barnaby Joyce who'd been in the headlines for getting Johnny Depp into trouble for a similar illegal pet situation!

Owen Swan's illustrations can also be seen in these books:

Savvides, Irini, *Hide and Seek*, Scholastic Australia, 2008. A picture book about a child coming to terms with loss.

Farrer, Vashti, *Lilli-Pilli the Frog Princess*, Scholastic Australia, 2010. A modern fairy tale that celebrates being true to yourself.

Cummings, Phil, *Anzac Biscuits*, Scholastic Australia, 2015. The story of a family separated by war.

Cummings, Phil, *Newspaper Hats*, Scholastic Press Australia, 2015. A young girl named Georgie visits her grandfather in a nursing home.

Kitchin, Ben, *The Red Feather*, New Frontier, 2015. Boys discover the fun of sharing.

George, Angela May, *Out*. A refugee story. Scholastic Press Australia 2016. .