

A Cat Called Trim

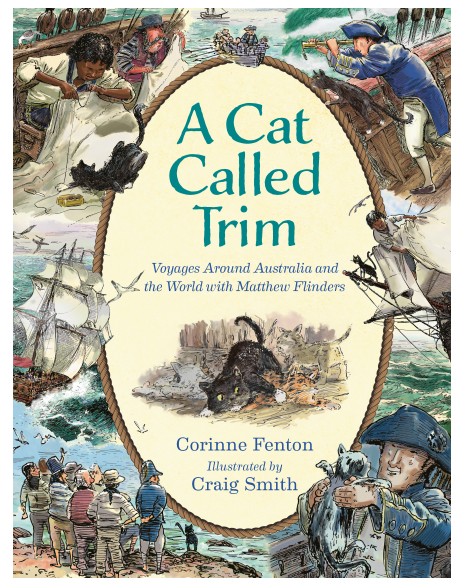
By Corinne Fenton,
illustrated by Craig Smith

January 2026

ISBN 9781761182693

Format hardcover

Recommended for 5-8-year-olds



Summary

This is the true story of a courageous, mischievous and fearless cat called Trim, who sailed with Matthew Flinders on his voyages to map the coastline of Australia and beyond.

From best-selling creators Corinne Fenton and Craig Smith, this charming picture book brings Trim's story to life.

A Cat Called Trim brings history to life by telling one of Australia's great adventure stories through the point of view of the smallest – and furriest – member of the party.

Corinne Fenton's rhythmic sentences, written in close third person, with Trim as the unusual protagonist, set up the lively personality of Trim and his relationship with Matthew Flinders.

Craig Smith's illustrations balance high drama at sea with comedy on land. Of particular note is when he shows Trim wreaking havoc in the Regency household while the text drily notes, 'Life in a house was much the same as shipboard-life'.

The lively book concludes with an ambiguous yet uplifting ending for Trim, and a historical footnote about Matthew Flinders.

Use in the curriculum

English

Younger students can engage with the book as a touching and adventurous story to listen to and pictures to understand. Using the pictures only, a retell of most of the story is possible.

Older students can explore the genres of biography and historical writing: how much is true in the book and how much imagined? The endpapers and Postscript are features of non-fiction texts. Corinne Fenton is known for her picture books based on true stories of animals in Australian history. She researches in depth each one of her stories.

In addition to learning the layout features of books, *A Cat Called Trim* supports the development of visual literacy. Investigate placement of text in relation to pictures and relative space taken up by text and pictures; elements of the story told or suggested only by the pictures (includes *irony*); use of colour; depiction of emotions and action.

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History and Social Sciences

Australian history is a feature of the early years of the primary curriculum. *A Cat Called Trim* speaks to the colonisation and exploration of Australia, early relations between Aboriginal and settler people and the settler way of life. For younger students, differences between life in modern times and the past, on land and on sea, are clear from the pictures.

The Aboriginal man, Bongaree (sometimes referred to as King Bungaree), who befriends Trim on board the *Norfolk*, so impressed Matthew Flinders that he asked him to accompany him on his famous circumnavigation of Australia and other voyages. For a 7 min discussion of Bongaree's hitherto overlooked role in Australian history go to:

<https://abclisten.page.link/5CZVrdEoB6cVNYLF9>.

The many statues of Matthew Flinders (and Trim) are testament to the way 'communities express themselves culturally and through civic participation'. Where is the statue of Bongaree?

There is a geographical background to the narrative, reinforced by the maps on the endpapers. Students need to place the story not only in historical time, but in geographical places.

Art

Apart from visual literacy opportunities (above), the book could be used to compare its illustrative artwork with the many painterly maritime artworks of the past. Explore how Craig Smith conveys humour, action and emotions in his illustrations.

Sea shanties form a solid plank of traditional settler folk music and could be learned. The classic 'Bound for South Australia' would be the best known. The Sailors' Hornpipe and other jigs could be viewed or learned and performed.

Discussion questions and activities

Before reading *A Cat Called Trim* examine closely the book's front cover.

- Ask students when and where they think this story might be set (today or a long time ago), where the man and cat might be, and whether they might be friends or enemies.
- Discuss what in the image gave them clues to their answers – scaffold by suggesting things that can influence our thinking such as colour, clothes, framing, subject matter, and the font used in the title.

After reading:

- Why would Matthew Flinders regret his decision to stop at the Isle de France?
- What did Matthew Flinders think happened to Trim after he disappeared?

Fill in the gaps

Trim was born on a ship called R_____. and stood out from the rest of the litter as more c_____, mischievous and f_____.

When Trim fell overboard, Matthew Flinders saved Trim's life by _____.

Trim trusted Bongaree because_____.

Trim streaked up the rigging of the ship when he heard anyone say, 'A_____ up a_____.'



In the classroom...

Trim's job on board the *Investigator* was to catch m_____ and be boss of several d_____.

Trim and Matthew Flinders sailed down the west coast of A_____ and across the Gr_____. A_____ B_____.

The *Porpoise* was shipwrecked on a coral r_____ and Matthew Flinders sailed back to Port J_____ to get a rescue ship.

Trim and Matthew Flinders set sail for England next onboard the C_____.

Trim and Matthew Flinders stopped at the I_____ de F_____ for urgent supplies and repair

True or False

T	F	Trim stayed with Matthew Flinders all the time after the shipwreck of the <i>Porpoise</i> .
T	F	Trim returned to England with Matthew Flinders.

Visual literacy

Ask students to look closely at the book's endpapers (the images appearing on the inside front and back covers) and find three clues for when this story is set and what it will be about.

Explain to your class that illustrations in picture books often tell us much more than words. Turn to the page with the words 'Sailing on the *Norfolk*, Trim met Bongaree, who took special care of him. Animals trust those who show kindness.' Now ask students to look closely at the two images of Bongaree and find information that is not mentioned in the text. [Hint: (a) he was Aboriginal, (b) one of his jobs was to sew patches in the ship's sails, and (c) Trim would climb up with him when he was replacing the sails.]

Compare the illustration of HMS *Reliance* in the storm with the illustration of HMS *Investigator* in calm waters eight pages later. How has the illustrator used colour (darker for the storm, lighter for sunny weather) and perspective (looking up at the boat in the former and looking down at the boat in the latter) to depict the ships in different conditions? How do the birds in the second image add to the image of calm and tranquillity?

Retell the story from Trim's point of view. Start your story with the line: I was born on a ship called *Reliance* and quickly stood out because I'm

On-line resources

Want to learn more about Trim and Matthew Flinders? The following websites provide lots of information for students to research.

<https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/behind-the-scenes/blog/trim-cat>

<https://australianmuseum.net.au/about/history/exhibitions/trailblazers/matthew-flinders/>

<https://australianmuseum.net.au/about/history/exhibitions/trailblazers/bungaree/>

<http://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/flinders-circumnavigates-australia>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Flinders

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trim_\(cat\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trim_(cat))

Research Questions

Why is Matthew Flinders famous in Australian history?

Who was Bongaree and why was he sailing with Matthew Flinders and Trim?

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Who was Bongaree and why was he sailing with Matthew Flinders and Trim?

What do the initials HMS stand for?

What important thing did Matthew Flinders discover about Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land)?

What does *circumnavigate* mean?

Where can you find a statue of Trim in Sydney?

The author

Corinne Fenton has established a reputation for writing beautiful picture-book histories of animals whose lives have become legendary.

Her award-winning books include: *Lionel and Me*, *My Friend Tertius*, *Bob the Railway Dog*, *The Dog on the Tuckerbox* and *Queenie: One Elephant's Story*. Her titles *Little Dog and the Christmas Wish* and *One Christmas Eve*, were chosen as themes for the Myer Christmas Windows.

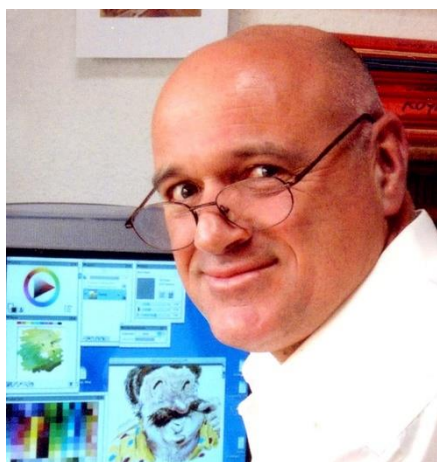
Almost all of Corinne's stories, fiction or non-fiction, feature an animal as the main character. Corinne has been an Assistant Regional Adviser for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, a Judge for the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Competition and a Fellow of the May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust. Her favourite kind of day is to sit with a new picture book text, searching for perfect words



About researching *A Cat Called Trim*, she says:

'From almost the first moment I started researching *A Cat Called Trim*, Tosca, the huge fluffy cat with "look-through-you-eyes" who lives next door, started sitting at my front door, waiting and meowing. It seemed as though he knew I was writing about a cat.

The funny thing is that cats make me sneeze and my eyes go all puffy if I touch them, so I couldn't even give him a pat! And instead of sitting down next to him, I had to follow him around the garden and up and down the paths while I was writing. He was great for research and studying how cats react to different situations.'



The illustrator

Craig Smith is one of Australia's most prolific, best-known and well-loved children's book illustrators, with over 400 books published. He has collaborated with many of Australia's best-loved authors, such as Paul Jennings and Doug MacLeod, and has illustrated books for Allen and Unwin including *The Big Ball of String*, *The Boy Who Built the Boat*, *Heather Fell in the Water*, *Where Are You Banana?* and *I Was Only Nineteen*. Craig's work over the last 45 years has been acknowledged in the CBCA Book of the Year awards, as well as in children's choice awards around Australia. In 2011, Craig was awarded the biennial Euphemia Tanner Award, which recognised his distinguished services to children's literature and his encouragement of the joy of reading in children.