

THE KING'S STILTS - PUBLISHED IN 1939

Background Information:

This book's original dedication (removed in later editions) was to "Alison Margaret Budd and Deirdre Clodagh Budd" but also to "All the Irish Cats and seagulls on the shores of Inchydoney." Inchydoney Island is located in County Cork in southern Ireland. For towns in that area, protection against flooding is one of the more important public-works issues. The Great Flood of 1853 caused enormous destruction in much of the county. Ted turned cats and seagulls into patrol cats protecting the seawall of Dike Trees from the Nizzards. The idea of patrol cats may also have come from Felix the Cat, one of the most popular cartoon characters during the time Ted attended Dartmouth.

This book also has the text in prose and illustrations in black-and-white with single-color highlights. Helen and Ted worked together on the words of his books as he considered her an editor and a partner. The drafts of this book show Helen's small, precise handwriting at pivotal turns: inserting dialogue, expanding a theme, deftly turning the plot around, zooming in on segments where Ted seemed to be having problems. First Ted sketched illustrations in pencil, drawing them in pairs as they would appear on facing pages of the books. To establish conflict or menace he scrawled notes on copy paper or on the sketches themselves. Example as the king first mounts his stilts: "High in the air, crown askew, ermines streaming behind him, the King . . . strutted, chuckling to himself, whistling . . . raced at breakneck speed. Black-spotted coach dogs romped along beside him and nipped at the heels of his flashing red stilts . . . townsfolk looked on and just loved it . . ."

In the spirit of true research, Ted even learned to walk on stilts although not with the panache of the King. *The King's Stilts* was the first book published by Random House and they remained his publisher for the rest of his life. All of his children's books are still in print—an amazing feat!

Ideas and Activities:

1. Compare this story with *King Bidgood's in the Bathtub* by Audrey and Don Wood
2. The kingdom has 500 Day Patrol Cats and 500 Night Patrol Cats. What book does that remind you of?
3. Point out the use of series of threes: (the third should be slightly different or extended)
 - ∞ Look at his crown! Look at his beard! Look at him laughing!
 - ∞ Stewed Nizzards for breakfast. Cold Nizzards for lunch. Fried Nizzards for supper. And every other Thursday they served him Nizzard hash.
4. Talk about jobs where stilts might be handy. Ask students to imagine what they might be able to do if they could walk on stilts. They can write/draw or both to show this.
5. List some jobs where signing one's name might be important or have to be done often.
6. Let the students make tin can stilts and practice walking with them. Or make one or two pairs and let the students try them. (see directions for **Tin Can Stilts**.)
7. Discuss why, when you work hard, it might be important to play.
8. Let students pretend they are the king or queen of a country. Have them list their most important job, the job they think would be the most fun, and the worst job.
9. Let students pair up and try to match the vocabulary words with definitions on the **Vocabulary Memory page** by Shirley Cook.