



Maneki Neko: The Tale of the Beckoning Cat written by Susan Lendroth illustrated by Kathryn Otoshi

About the Book

Genre: Fiction

Format: Paperback, 32 pages

ISBN: 9781885008923

Reading Level: Grade K–4

Interest Level: Grades 3–4

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Animals (Cats), Japan, Folklore (legends), Cultural Symbols, Fortune, Kindness, Traditions, Asian/Asian American Interest

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/maneki-neko

SYNOPSIS

In a small Japanese village, a poor monk and his cat Tama live a simple life at the Kotoku Monastery. One day, a great storm passes through the village, and Tama is caught in the rain outside the temple. She waits under the eaves of a small shrine, cleaning her face and whiskers as best she can with her paw. A noble samurai is also passing through, and stops his horse under the cover of a large tree. But through the rain, what does he see? A cat with a raised paw, beckoning him forward?

Curious, the samurai urges his horse forward. Just then, a bolt of lightning flashes and strikes the tree behind him, splitting it in two. The beckoning cat has saved his life. In his gratitude, the samurai brings riches to the small temple and the monk, who shares his wealth with the village.

So goes the Japanese legend of *Maneki Neko*, the beckoning cat. And to this day, the cat with raised paw beckoning guests is a symbol of good luck and good fortune in many Asian countries.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

The Beckoning Cat

Statues of “Maneki Neko,” or “the beckoning cat,” are common Asian souvenirs and décor. While the cat looks like it’s waving, it actually portrays the Japanese gesture of beckoning someone by putting one’s palm forward, facing down, according to National Geographic (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-fascinating-history-behind-the-popular-waving-lucky-cat>). *Maneki Neko* symbolizes good luck. There are several origin stories, all from Japan, including the one told in this book about a cat born at Gotokuji Temple in Tokyo.

Today *Maneki Neko* statues are often placed prominently in businesses like restaurants and stores to attract prosperity and success. Japanese culture includes a deep-seated belief in the powers of cats, and that taking care of a cat will bring good fortune. For more information about cats in Japan and lots of images of *Maneki Neko*, watch a short feature produced by the Today Show during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXX79eaZsOg>.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What does it mean to have “good luck?” What things or actions have you heard about that are said to bring people good luck?
- What do you think you know about Japan?
- Have you ever heard a legend or folktale that explains how something came to be? What was the story and what did it explain? (Be prepared with an example to share if needed to spark discussion.)

You may want to chart student responses questions so that you can refer back to them during or after reading. You could also have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Book Title Exploration: Talk about the title and subtitle of the book, *Maneki Neko: The Tale of the Beckoning Cat*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might

learn? What makes them think that? What do students know about the word “beckoning?” Provide a student-friendly definition: “To beckon means to motion or call someone to come towards you.” Practice “beckoning” to each other.

Book Walk: Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, glossary, dedication, and illustrations. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration?

Read Author’s and Illustrators Biographies: See the end of this guide. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? Why do you think Susan Lendroth wrote this book for young readers?

Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the reading when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

Have students write feeling(s) in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it. Have students complete one journal entry per each reading session.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- What surprising things happen in this story?
- What does this story explain about a beckoning cat?

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students’ prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students’ vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

monk, Tama, village, Japan, monastery, shopkeepers, rice, tofu, dried fish, bowed, Sensei, tatami mat, shoji screens, moths, lantern, horizon, charcoal, dusk, thunder, kimono, courtyard, buffet, stalking, downpour, eaves, shrine, samurai, armor, deluge, pine tree, bolts of lightning, green tea, riches, temple, “good fortune,” whiskers

Academic

beckoning, poor, scraps, immediately, polish, curled, cradled, peaceful, meager, morsel, precious, murmured, frayed, moist, smoothing, fierce, smudge, roiled, boiled, marching, gigantic, scurried, streaked, scattered, torrential, hunched, bedraggled, noble, brief, glimpses, scenes, cluster, wavered, huddled, shuttered, silence, peered, hurled, blasted, stiffly, charged, slammed, ushered, groomed, honorable, ancient, vowed, better, companion, transformed, plump, bestowed, wisely, wealth, custom

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. How does the monk meet the cat? What does he notice right away? How does the cat react to meeting the monk?
2. What does the monk name the cat? (Use the glossary to find out that “Tama” means “round.”)
3. Where does the monk live? What is his life like? What do he and Tama do together?
4. What are the signs that a storm is coming? How do people react? What does the monk do?
5. What is Tama doing when the storm begins?
6. What happens to the samurai during the storm? What does he see?
7. What happens when the samurai goes toward the Tama?
8. When the monk looks outside during the storm, what does he see? What does he do?
9. How does the samurai treat the monk and Tama? What changes for them?
10. Why do people travel to see Tama? What do they notice her doing? How do they react?
11. What new tradition starts because of Tama? What new name does she receive?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Do you think the monk is happy with his life before the storm? Do you think he considers himself lucky then? Why or why not?
2. How do the author's words help you imagine the storm? Give a specific example.
3. How do you think the monk feels when he can't find Tama as the storm starts? What makes you think that?

4. How do you think the samurai feels when he sees Tama sitting by the shrine during the storm? What makes you think that?
5. What did you imagine as the storm started? What words did the author use to help you?
6. Why do you think Tama acts the way she does during the storm? What makes you think that?
7. How do you think the monk, Tama, and the samurai feel once they're inside from the storm?
8. Do you agree with the samurai that Tama "saved his life?" Why or why not?
9. What surprised you in this book? Why?
10. Do you think Tama actually beckoned to anyone? Why or why not?
11. Why do you think the idea of *Maneki Neko* became so popular? What do you think people like about it?
12. Why do you think shopkeepers like statues of *Maneki Neko* so much? Do you think they work to bring wealth? Why or why not?
13. What surprised you in this book? Why?
14. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young readers?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What do you think the author's message to the reader is? What do you think she wanted to convey to young readers?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What is your role in your own family?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Maneki Neko*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *Maneki Neko* make you think of that?
5. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *Maneki Neko*?
6. Choose a part of the story you enjoyed imagining. Make a list of things you imagined as you read this part. Include specific words the author used that helped you imagine.
7. Make a list of situations that could be considered "good luck" in this story. Do you think "good luck" is real? Why or why not? Give an example from the story and an example from your own life to support your reasoning.

Multilingual Learner Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about something lucky they wish would happen.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilinguallearning-toolkit.org/>.
7. Have students act out various scenes in the story to support comprehension.
8. Show students photos of *Maneki Neko* statues in shops and restaurants.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills do the characters exhibit over the course of

the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How does the character demonstrate these skills?

2. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions.
3. Use sticky notes to label the emotions of various characters at different points in the book. Have students choose an emotion that interests them: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance, regret, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *Maneki Neko* and then also in an example from modern-day life.
4. Do you think the author wants the monk in this book to be a role model for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not?

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Read other traditional folktales from Japan, such as *The Crane Girl*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-crane-girl>). Make connections between texts.
- **Read legends and tales from other cultures that relate to something becoming famous for its helpful abilities, including other animal tales like *Magic Dogs of the Volcanoes/Los perros mágicos de los volcanes*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/magic-dogs-of-the-volcanoes-los-perros-magicos-de-los-volcanes>) **and even tall tales like *Grandpa's Hal-la-loo-ya Hambone*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grandpa-s-hal-la-loo-ya-hambone>). Make connections between texts, and wonder together about why stories like these appeal to people.
- **Compare and contrast this story to *Selvakumar Knew Better*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/selvakumar-knew-better>), **the true story of a dog that saved a boy during a 2004 tsunami.** Use a Venn diagram to chart students' thinking about how the stories are both similar and different.
- **Use the story structure of *Maneki Neko* as a way to help students plan, write, and illustrate their own animal tales.** For instance, "Introduce the animal," "Animal helps during a challenging event," "Others say thank you," and "Animal becomes famous for a

certain feature.”

- **Have students write thought bubbles for Tama at different points throughout the story.** Invite them to create two versions—serious and silly.
- **Help students review key story events by turning portions of the book into comic strips.** Then, invite them to create their own Tama/*Maneki Neko* comic strip stories in which the cat helps someone else by bringing them luck.
- **Use the storm scenes from the book to study using precise language to describe the setting—especially a weather event.** Incorporate conversations about or review of relevant academic vocabulary words. Encourage students to experiment with using similar devices (e.g., interesting vocabulary and details, simile, personification) when describing the weather in their own writing.
- **Ask students to make advertisement posters encouraging tourists to visit Gotokuji Temple to see *Maneki Neko*.** Ask them to share the details from the story that informed their work.

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students find Japan, and then Tokyo on a world map.** Have students use Google Earth to explore the area, including locating Gotokuji Temple. As they zoom in, talk about what could look similar to the time period of the story, and what looks different in the present day.
- **Invite students to learn more about the history of Japanese reverence for cats, including learning about its famous “Cat Islands,” such as Aoshima** (See <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/03/a-visit-to-aoshima-a-cat-island-in-japan/386647/>.) Host a classroom debate: Do cats have special powers? Why or why not? Encourage students to use their research to support their arguments.
- **Have students research good luck animals or other items thought to bring protection or prosperity around the world.** This National Geographic feature (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/evil-eyes-and-other-good-luck-charms-around-the-world>) offers many examples, from four-leaf clovers and rabbit feet to Thai lucky elephants. Establish shared research questions, document students’ findings and make connections between traditions.

Science/STEM

K-ESS2-1 Earth's Systems (Use and share observations of local weather conditions to describe patterns over time)

K-ESS3-2 Earth and Human Activity (Ask questions to obtain information about the purpose of weather forecasting to prepare for, and respond to, severe weather.*) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

- **Learn more about thunderstorms and how lightning can cause damage.** Make connections to story events.

Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Look at images of *Maneki Neko* artwork (statues, paintings, murals, etc.).** What common themes and features do students notice? What varies?
- **Invite students to create their own lucky statues.** Ask them to write about one special feature their statue has, like *Maneki Neko's* raised paw. Or, together, design your own lucky class mascot to display at the entrance to your classroom. Share its story with your school community.

School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Together, create a summary of this story that students can share with their families.** Have students survey family or community members about what they think brings good luck. List all the responses at school and look for patterns. Come up with ways to represent the data you collect.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Lendroth enjoys telling tales set in the past and has written two previous picture books. She lives in the Los Angeles area with her daughter and an ill-mannered orange cat named Jr, who has never learned to beckon.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Kathryn Otoshi is a cat lover and an award-winning author and illustrator who has always wanted to do a children's picture book based on her own Japanese heritage. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her husband, Daniel, and two cockatiels.

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