

# JUST SO STORIES

RUDYARD KIPLING

# OVERVIEW

- ▶ Just So Stories is a collection of Rudyard Kipling's animal tales in which we learn about 'How the Whale got his Throat', 'How the Camel got his Hump', 'How the Rhinoceros got his Skin', 'How the Leopard got his Spots', 'The Elephant's Child', 'The Sing-Song of Old Man Kangaroo', 'The Beginning of the Armadilloes', 'How the First Letter was Written', 'How the Alphabet was Made', 'The Crab that Played with the Sea', 'The Cat that Walked by Himself' and 'The Butterfly that Stamped'.
- ▶ These witty, inventive stories have delighted generations of children.
- ▶ Just So Stories for Little Children is a 1902 collection of origin stories by the British author Rudyard Kipling. Considered a classic of children's literature, the book is among Kipling's best known works.
- ▶ Kipling began working on the book by telling the first three chapters as bedtime stories to his daughter Josephine. These had to be told "just so" (exactly in the words she was used to) or she would complain. The stories describe how one animal or another acquired its most distinctive features, such as how the leopard got his spots. For the book, Kipling illustrated the stories himself.

- ▶ The stories have appeared in a variety of adaptations including a musical and animated films. Evolutionary biologists have noted that what Kipling did in fiction in a Lamarckian way, they have done in reality, providing Darwinian explanations for the evolutionary development of animal features.
- ▶ The Just So Stories began as bedtime stories told by Kipling to his daughter "Effie" (Josephine, Kipling's firstborn); when the first three were published in a children's magazine, a year before her death, Kipling explained: "in the evening there were stories meant to put Effie to sleep, and you were not allowed to alter those by one single little word.
- ▶ They had to be told just so; or Effie would wake up and put back the missing sentence. So at last they came to be like charms, all three of them — the whale tale, the camel tale, and the rhinoceros tale."
- ▶ Nine of the thirteen Just So Stories tell how particular animals were modified from their original forms to their current forms by the acts of human beings or magical beings.
- ▶ For example, the Whale has a tiny throat because he swallowed a mariner, who tied a raft inside to block the whale from swallowing other men.
- ▶ The Camel has a hump given to him by a djinn as punishment for the camel's refusing to work (the hump allows the camel to work longer between times of eating).

- ▶ The Leopard's spots were painted by an Ethiopian (after the Ethiopian painted himself black).
- ▶ The Kangaroo gets its powerful hind legs, long tail and hopping gait after being chased all day by a dingo, sent by a minor god responding to the Kangaroo's request to be made different from all other animals.

## STORIES

- ▶ *How the Whale Got His Throat* — why the larger whales eat only small prey.
- ▶ *How the Camel Got His Hump* — how the idle camel was punished and given a hump.
- ▶ *How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin* — why rhinos have folds in their skin and bad tempers.
- ▶ *How the Leopard Got His Spots* — why leopards have spots.
- ▶ *The Elephant's Child/How the Elephant got his Trunk* — how the elephant's trunk became long.
- ▶ *The Sing-Song of Old Man Kangaroo* — how the kangaroo assumed long legs and tail.
- ▶ *The Beginning of the Armadillos* — how a hedgehog and tortoise transformed into the first armadillos.
- ▶ *How the First Letter Was Written* — introduces the only characters who appear in more than one story: a family of cave-people, called Tegumai Bopsulai (the father), Teshumai Tewindrow (the mother), and Taffimai Metallumai, shortened to Taffy, (the daughter). Explains how Taffy delivered a picture message to her mother.
- ▶ *How the Alphabet Was Made* — tells how Taffy and her father invent an alphabet.

- ▶ *The Crab that Played with the Sea* — explains the ebb and flow of the tides, as well as how the crab changed from a huge animal into a small one.
- ▶ *The Cat that Walked by Himself* — explains how man domesticated all the wild animals, even the cat, which insisted on greater independence.
- ▶ *The Butterfly that Stamped* — how Solomon saved the pride of a butterfly, and the Queen of Sheba used this to prevent his wives scolding him.
- ▶ *The Tabu Tale* (missing from most British editions; first appeared in the Scribner edition in the U.S. in 1903).