



A young girl and her koro look out over their forest, Te Rākau, listening for the heartbeat of Tāne Mahuta. The forest shelters many birds and insects, as well as many very old trees.

This deceptively simple, evocative story has a strong conservation message. Through the eyes of the young girl, we learn the different opinions that other family members have of the mayor's plan to allow developers to destroy part of the forest and build houses.

By drawing on connections with other items in this Journal, students can compare the ways that writers convey information and opinions to meet their purposes and audiences.

## Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

Koro and I are standing at the edge of the trees. We're at the top of the hill. We can see for miles and miles.  
"This is the last of it, you know," he says. "Te Rākau used to spread out as far as you can see. Some people say Tāne has been driven away from here."  
Off in the distance, we can see James Turnbull's red ute, snaking through the farmland.

"Koro," I say, "isn't it only the west end of Te Rākau that will be cut down? Isn't the rest on Māori land?"  
Koro looks at me, his eyes patient and kind but with a sadness behind them.  
"Well, yes," he says. "But there is no beginning and no end to a forest. It is all connected."  
He clears his throat.  
"The west end is where some of the oldest trees live. The high canopy helps the plants below. Most of the birds and insects live in the west end. I'm thinking about Tāne. It will break his heart if they go."  
Koro watches silently as James Turnbull's ute drives deep into Te Rākau.

It's really late when the phone rings. Koro has had to go to hospital. I hope it's not his heart breaking.  
"It's all this hassle with Te Rākau," says Dad. We're all waiting with Koro.  
No one wants to argue with Dad; we're all too worried. Nan can't stop crying.  
Soon the doctor comes in. He tells everyone that Koro will be OK – he's suffering from exhaustion.  
"It's been too much for him," says Auntie. "He's been down to the council to see James Turnbull every day."  
"And all this trouble with Wiremu," says Mum.  
Wiremu and his friends have been climbing the trees, trying to stop the loggers from cutting them down.  
"That boy needs to stop it," says Dad. "It's not going to change a thing."

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps the students to understand

sentences that vary in length and structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

## Possible curriculum contexts

### SCIENCE (Living World)

LEVEL 3 – Ecology: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.

### ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

### ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

### Possible reading purposes

- To understand and relate to different opinions about conservation
- To identify the way the writer shapes his story for a specific purpose and audience
- To think critically about the ways members of a community respond to development.

### Possible writing purposes

- To recount a time when members of your family or community had different views about something
- To explore ways of conveying a purpose to different audiences.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

## Text and language challenges

### VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “quiver”, “the late shift”, “meatworks”, “cheek”, “passageway”
- The use of colloquial language: “Hōhā!”, “The cheek of him”, “Yeah”, “Don’t you go getting yourself into trouble”
- The use of metaphor: “you can hear the heart of Tāne beating in our forest”, “I stretch my ears”, “got the green light”, “storms out of the house”, “snaking”
- The use of simile: “quiet as a cat”, “as good as gone”, “like a snarling dog”, “like matchstick boxes”
- The use of te reo Māori (with a glossary).

### Possible supporting strategies

Discuss the way that language is used in literary texts (for example, the use of metaphor and simile). Prompt the students to identify why a writer might use these, for example, to convey feelings or to make an emotional impact. Explore similes and metaphors that are part of everyday use, such as “as good as gone” or “break his heart”. Groups of students could look for and list examples that have a common theme, such as similes for movement or facial expressions and metaphors for the body and health. You could display the lists to refer to and add to. Encourage students who know languages other than English to discuss and share common metaphors and similes in these languages.

Identify new vocabulary that the students should prioritise for learning. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Experiences of being in a forest
- An understanding of conservation and threats to the environment, especially from housing developments
- An understanding of family relationships and the range of opinions within a family
- Social and historical knowledge of New Zealand, including loss of land for Māori.

### Possible supporting strategies

Provide opportunities for the students to share their experiences of forests and bush and of conservation issues related to places they know. Ask the students to share any experiences of the landscape being changed for development, such as a new road or housing subdivision. Prompt them to discuss the reasons for development, as well as the reasons against it.

It might be best to discuss the different opinions within the family after the students have evaluated the story for themselves.

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- The narrative structure, with events narrated in chronological order but with shifts in time and place
- The use of design devices (rather than signal words) to indicate shifts in time and place
- The use of dialogue that is not always attributed to convey information about the characters
- Māori beliefs, including the underlying belief in the forest as the embodiment of Tāne Mahuta
- The enigmatic ending
- The variety of sentence structures, including simple, compound, and complex sentences, and incomplete sentences.

### Possible supporting strategies

As the students start reading, support them to identify the setting and characters. For some students, it may help to have them list characters and their relationships as they read.

Set a purpose for reading, and encourage students to discuss with a partner whether they are meeting their purpose as they read.

Analyse one or two different kinds of sentences to find out how they are constructed. Discuss other ways of conveying the same information and compare the effectiveness of each one. Break down sentences and identify who, what, when, or where as appropriate and label the parts of the sentences. You could also label parts of speech, such as verbs, nouns, and prepositions, and explore how selected phrases function in sentences.

On a first or a second reading, you could guide students in using a graphic organiser to record the characters, their relationships, their opinions and reasons for them, and how we know these things (the evidence in the text).

# Instructional focus – Reading

**Science** (Living World, level 3 – Ecology: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.)

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

## Text excerpts from “Heartbeat”

Koro Rex says if you listen closely, you can hear the heart of Tāne Mahuta beating in our forest, Te Rākau.

“Can you hear it?” he asks. I stretch my ears towards the rimu trees, into the ferns, and over the streams.

I want to hear it. But I can’t.

I shake my head and wonder if Koro will be disappointed. The leaves quiver in the breeze. A bird calls. The branches rustle and sway.

I hop onto my bike and race out through town. On the way, I pass Mr Turnbull, our mayor. He’s posing for a photo. He’s next to another man in a suit. They’re shaking hands and holding up a picture of our town. I can’t believe it. In the picture, there are hundreds of tiny new houses – half of Te Rākau has disappeared.

“It’s been too much for him,” says Auntie. “He’s been down to the council to see James Turnbull every day.”

“And all this trouble with Wiremu,” says Mum.

Wiremu and his friends have been climbing the trees, trying to stop the loggers from cutting them down.

“That boy needs to stop it,” says Dad. “It’s not going to change a thing.”

Nan stands up then.

“Now listen,” she says, wiping away her tears. “His grandfather would climb those trees too, if he could. He’s in that bed now because he loves that forest so much.”

## Students (what they might do)

*Students make connections between the setting and the characters and their own experiences of forests and of family relationships. The students draw on the illustrations and the language features to identify the way the writer sets the scene and mood.*

*As they read the story for the first time, they locate, evaluate, and integrate the information to form hypotheses about the possible plot and theme of the story.*

*Students ask and answer questions about what the girl sees, drawing on knowledge of development to infer that the mayor has reached an agreement with a developer to open up the forest for housing.*

*The students start to think critically about the conflict between development and the natural environment.*

*The students draw on a range of comprehension strategies as they read the text, making connections with their experiences of family relationships and their knowledge about protests to infer the different motivations of the characters. They evaluate the characters’ reactions and think critically about the way attitudes can differ between different generations.*

*The students identify the way the writer uses dialogue to show different sides to the issue, and they infer that the writer’s sympathies are with Wiremu and his grandparents.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**TELL** the students to identify the setting, characters, plot, and theme as they read.

- If it helps, make notes about the characters as you read. Make a brief note of anything you learn about each character.
- Notice the narrative pattern and the way the sections are marked. How do you keep track of where and when each section is set?
- Think about the way the writer sets a mood and consider how this might give clues to the plot and theme.

**ASK QUESTIONS** to help the students as they form hypotheses on their first reading.

- What do you think might happen in the story? Why do you think that?
- What might the story’s theme be? Why?
- Why do you think the writer starts the story in this way?

**ASK QUESTIONS** to help the students think critically about the text during or after reading.

- What is the meaning of what she sees?
- Why are the men looking so pleased?
- Who will benefit from the development? Who or what will suffer?
- What is your opinion of the development? What are your reasons?

**PROMPT** the students to make connections and think critically.

- What connections can you make between the text and your own experiences of families?
- Why do you think Dad does not share his parents’ and his son’s concern? What can you infer about Dad’s concerns?
- How does this piece of dialogue reveal the writer’s purpose? Why do you think that?

If students need support to understand the family dynamics, make a chart to show which characters are for, against, or neutral about logging the forest and the evidence for this. You could show this as a continuum and include the mayor and the developer.

**GIVE FEEDBACK**

- After sharing ... you reread ... and that helped you to identify ... Rereading is a useful strategy for a particular focus.
- You made good use of the story map to keep track of the characters and the plot. That’s a useful reading strategy when a writer expects you to work some things out yourself.

## METACOGNITION

- You’ve had to think hard to work out what was happening in this story. Show me a place where you stopped and went back to work something out? What strategies did you use? Share your thinking with a partner.
- What helped you to understand the relationships and differences between the people in this story?
- What specific aspects of the structure or language use could support you in your writing?

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**Science** (Living World, level 3 – Ecology: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.)

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

## Text excerpts from “Heartbeat”

The TV is on, but Dad is half asleep on the couch. He’s worked the late shift at the meatworks.

My big brother, Wiremu, is working on his motorbike in the driveway. Mum’s out shopping.

“Höhā!” shouts Uncle Tiny.

Aunty pokes her head through the kitchen door.

“You OK?” she says.

“Of course I’m not OK. Look. They finally got the green light.”

...

“The cheek of him,” says Uncle. “Thinking he can chop down our ngahere so strangers can come and build their houses here.”

“Rex is a kaitiaki. Wiremu is a kaitiaki,” she continues. “They are the heartbeat of Tāne Mahuta. If they don’t stand up for Te Rākau and for Tāne, then who will?”

## Examples of text characteristics

### SETTING

*An author can use detailed descriptions of a scene or much simpler “snapshots” that use a few lines. The use of the present tense creates immediacy and drama by describing the scene as if it is happening at that moment.*

### DIALOGUE

*Using natural, colloquial language makes dialogue come to life. People often speak in incomplete sentences and use idioms or common expressions. By reflecting this in dialogue, writers can show readers a lot about the characters.*

### USING TE REO MĀORI (OR OTHER LANGUAGES)

*Writers who draw on their own language and culture may use words and expressions that some readers will not understand. Adding a glossary is a good way for a writer to use their own language and support readers at the same time.*

## METACOGNITION

- What features of André Ngāpō’s writing could you use in your own writing? What effect do you want to achieve?
- How does the audience affect the way you tell your story? For example, how much do you expect them to work out for themselves?
- How else could you have achieved your writing purpose? Can fiction be more effective than a factual story for some topics? Why do you think that?

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**PROMPT** the students to experiment with setting the scene in their writing.

- Review the way you’ve shown a scene. Now write it in a very different style, for example, if you’ve used a rich description with a lot of adjectives and descriptive verbs, try writing it in a very minimal way – pare the sentences back to the bare facts. Which style best suits your purpose?
- How could changing the tense change the impact?
- How do you want your audience to feel?
- Play with a few different styles and ask your partner for feedback as you decide on the style that best meets your purpose and audience.

**MODEL** this process for students who need more support, for example, by taking a rich description and making it simpler or vice versa.

Encourage one or more students to share parts of their writing.

- Read your dialogue. We will listen and give you feedback on how natural it sounds.

**MODEL** giving constructive feedback, for example:

- Is that how you would say it if you were in this situation?
- You’ve used complete sentences. Listen while I read the dialogue aloud and think about whether it sounds normal.
- Is there a colloquial expression that the character could use instead of the formal words? How about ...

**DIRECT** students to repeat this activity in pairs, listening to each other’s written dialogue and giving constructive feedback. Remind them that ultimately, the writer has to decide how to write dialogue for their purpose and audience: it’s not always appropriate to use the kind of language a character would use in real life!

Note that ELLs who are new to New Zealand may not have enough language experience in English to know what “sounds natural”. These students will need many examples and explicit teaching.

**EXPLAIN** that writers use language in many different ways, for many different purposes.

- A writer may choose to use words in a language some readers will not know, and he or she must decide if, how, and when they will support their readers’ understanding.
- Think critically about the words you choose. What is your purpose? How will the words you choose help your audience understand your message? How will you support readers who do not know these words?
- If you’re using a glossary, check that your explanations relate to the context – this may not be the same as a direct translation. Many words have multiple meanings, so make sure the meaning you provide is the best fit.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- It can be hard to give feedback that is honest and constructive. The feedback you’ve given Mika shows you’ve considered some alternatives. You haven’t just told him his writing didn’t sound right.
- When you included words and expressions in the language you use at home, it helped me get a feeling for the way your family sees the world. I wouldn’t have understood this if it had all been in English.

 Writing standard: by the end of year 6

 The Literacy Learning Progressions