

Overview

This exciting, fast-paced myth retells a traditional story from Ngāti Awa. It portrays one chief's courageous actions to protect his iwi from the taniwha Tarakura.

Iratumoana, the chief, displays many qualities: bravery, fortitude, and decisiveness. He also shows wisdom and humility, understanding that he must consult and work with others if he is to prevail over the taniwha. The chief provides a positive role model of someone who puts himself in physical danger for the good of the community. You can read about the importance of taniwha in Māori tradition here: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/taniwha>

Adding to the authentic feel of the story, Iratumoana consults a tohunga (a skilled and wise person within an iwi who provides guidance, especially during difficult times).

The story has the timeless theme of two foes pitted against each other, and although it is somewhat bloodthirsty, the content, vivid descriptions, and dramatic illustrations will have strong appeal for many readers.

Texts related by theme

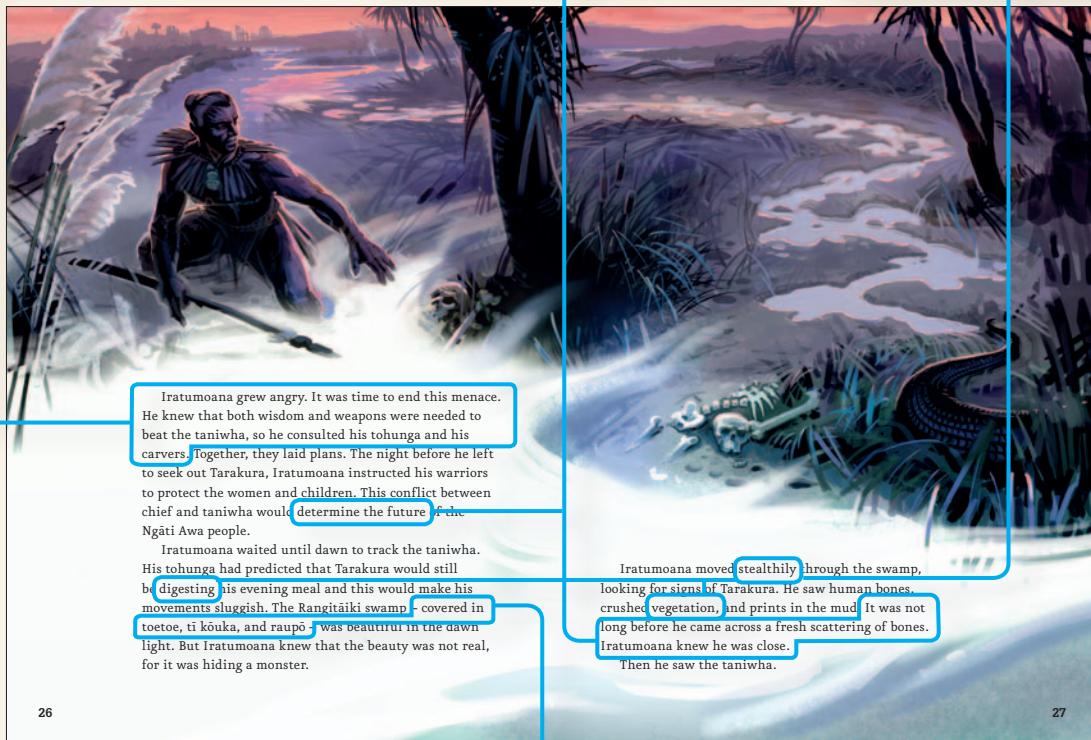
“A Piece of Paradise” L3 June 2012 | “The Wing of Maui’s Mōa” SJ 2.3.09 |
“Southern Lights” SJ 3.1.05

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

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

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

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations



some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Language features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.

Possible reading purposes

- To enjoy reading an exciting, authentic story about a Ngāti Awa chief and his battle with a taniwha
- To explore the language features, which make the story exciting.

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

Possible writing purposes

- To use the text as a model for writing a similar story
- To turn the story into a graphic text
- To write about a modern-day hero.

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

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “palisade”, “monstrous”, “plagued”, “toyed”, “lingered”, “talons”, “bold”, “menace”, “determine”, “sluggish”, “stealthily”, “vegetation”, “fetid”, “stench”, “encrusted”, “misplaced”, “vicious”, “implanting”, “backhander”, “deliberation”, “anticipation”, “penetrated”, “encircled”, “in unison”
- The use of te reo Māori, including “taniwha”, “tohunga”, and the names of people and plants
- The idiomatic expression “not a man to cross”.

Possible supporting strategies

Spend time familiarising yourself with the Māori words and terms that are new to you. Depending on your students’ knowledge, provide accurate support for pronunciation and meanings.

Use the Ngata dictionary (www.learningmedia.co.nz/ngata) or seek support within your school community or local iwi.

Before reading, preview key vocabulary that you think will be unfamiliar to your students. For example, you could use real objects, charades, audio, and/or audiovisual prompts to help students choose definitions from a set of jumbled definitions for the key words.

Preview key words and phrases used in vivid descriptions. During reading, encourage students to notice more of these words and phrases. Chart these for further exploration after reading and during writing.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with traditional stories from Māori or other cultures
- Familiarity with stories of taniwha
- Familiarity with good-and-evil stories and the dramatic language and images they use
- Knowledge of weapons (taiaha, patu) and how they can be used
- Knowledge of the good qualities of a chief, including courage on the battlefield
- Knowledge of the role of a tohunga.

Possible supporting strategies

Review the students’ knowledge of cultural concepts covered in the story. Activate or build their background knowledge, but keep in mind that students may be unaware of the knowledge they already have. Don’t assume that because a student is Māori, he or she will hold relevant knowledge.

Discuss the characteristics of heroes. You could have students work in small groups to make lists of characteristics and then have them compare their lists. You could ask students to compare characteristics of heroes in different cultures and/or times. During these discussions, you could feed in and explain key vocabulary.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Traditional story from Ngāti Awa, retold in written form by a member of that iwi
- Straightforward chronological narrative, with a beginning that sets the scene, a problem, and a resolution
- The figurative language, including “carved out of the bush”, “crowned with the skull of an enemy”, “toyed with his victim”, “the last aching breath lingered in their body”, “the hunger of the taniwha soared”, “his green eyes burned with hatred”, “ripped through the air”
- The words and phrases used in vivid descriptions, for example, low-frequency and highly specific verbs such as “prowled”, “toyed”, and “lingered”
- The separate information at the end in which the author explains how she knows the story
- The theme of courage against an enemy.

Possible supporting strategies

Before reading, discuss the kinds of stories Māori tell of ancient heroes – the deeds they did or the battles they fought. Discuss a familiar story, for example, stories about Māui, or ask students to share stories they know. Review what the students know about other traditional stories of courage against an enemy or of the exploits of taniwha.

This is an excellent opportunity for students from different cultures to share and compare stories they have grown up with. Review and compare the structures and features of these stories, and compare the themes they often convey.

The resource *Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools: A Guide for Teachers of Years 5 and 6* (SELLIPS) provides guidance on the language function of recounting on pages 18–25. (SELLIPS includes creative narrating and storytelling within recounting.)

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 3 – Language features: Show a developing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.)

Text excerpts from “Tarakura of the Rangitāiki Plains”

Students (what they might do)

Iratumoana was known throughout the lands of Ngāti Awa. He was feared and respected by all – and not a man to cross. Each palisade of his marae, crowned with the skull of an enemy, was proof of his warlike nature.

There was only one creature who was a match for Iratumoana. He was Tarakura, the monstrous taniwha who plagued the people of Ngāti Awa.

He knew that both wisdom and weapons were needed to beat the taniwha, so he consulted his tohunga and his carvers. Together, they laid plans. The night before he left to seek out Tarakura, Iratumoana instructed his warriors to protect the women and children. This conflict between chief and taniwha would determine the future of the Ngāti Awa people.

The warrior, exhausted, looked on in silence.

From the swamp, the water creatures came to claim the body of Tarakura. They encircled the taniwha and gently lifted him. Moving in unison, they carried Tarakura back into the Rangitāiki. He was never seen again.

Iratumoana, the great warrior and chief, returned to his people.

Students **make connections** between the text and their knowledge of traditional stories to identify that Iratumoana is a hero. They **infer** that he will be strong, brave, and powerful.

Students use their knowledge of idiom to understand the meaning of “not a man to cross”. They unpack the sentence “Each palisade ...” and **infer** from the skulls that Iratumoana had killed many people and uses the skulls as a warning to others.

Students **make connections** with other hero stories to **infer** that like some other heroes, the good guy has one main enemy. They **make connections** between the text and other stories about taniwha and **predict** that this story will be about a battle between Iratumoana and Tarakura.

Students **ask and answer questions** about the things Iratumoana needed and the reason he spoke to the tohunga and the carvers. They draw on their own knowledge of the role of a tohunga or a carver to **infer** how they helped Iratumoana prepare for battle.

Students **make predictions** about the possible outcomes and **infer** that if the battle goes badly, the women and children will be at risk. They further **infer** that a loss could mean the taniwha could destroy the whole iwi.

The students **make connections** between the text and personal experiences of achieving a difficult physical task to **visualise** Iratumoana and how he would feel.

They **integrate** information from the text and what they know of traditional stories (in particular, those that involve taniwha) to identify another feature of a traditional story: the beaten foe never returns.

METACOGNITION

- Find a place where you made a personal connection with the text. Turn to a partner and explain the connection and how it helped you understand something.
- What happens when you pause to think critically about an aspect of a text? When did you do that with this text, and where did your thinking lead you?

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Activate the students’ prior knowledge and make connections to previous discussions about stories that Māori tell of ancient heroes.

ASK QUESTIONS to encourage students’ thinking.

- What are the main features of these stories?
- What are the main characteristics of their heroes?

If students have already made lists of the characteristics of heroes, they could note which ones Iratumoana has and add others as they read.

Create a chart of the main features of the story, asking students to add to it during reading.

PROMPT the students to unpack the sentence “Each palisade ...”.

- What is the main clause?
- What does the phrase (“crowned ...”) refer to?
- What message would skulls on the palisades give to enemies?
- What can you infer about Iratumoana?

If necessary, support the students to work out the meanings of “a match for Iratumoana” and “plagued”.

PROMPT students to make connections between stories in which the hero has a powerful enemy and stories about taniwha.

- What do you know about taniwha?
- What do you predict will happen? Why do you think that?

PROMPT the students to consider the preparations for battle.

- Think about other stories where the hero goes to face a foe. What is needed?
- What can the tohunga provide?
- What can the carvers provide?


Add any new information to the chart, for example, that a hero needs weapons or tools and spiritual support.

DIRECT the students to share their thoughts about the story with a partner. They can consider one or more of these questions:

- Was this a satisfying ending? Why or why not?
- Have you heard this story, or others like it, before? If you wish, you can share another story with your partner. How is it similar?
- Why are stories like this told and handed down? What is their purpose?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The taniwha stories you know helped us understand how serious the threat was to Iratumoana. Thank you for sharing your knowledge.
- You’ve used what you know about taniwha stories to make that inference. How could you check to see if it seems correct?

 Reading standard: by the end of year 6

 The Literacy Learning Progressions

 Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.)

Text excerpts from “Tarakura of the Rangitāiki Plains”

Before roads were carved out of the bush, before the waters were drained from the swamps, there lived a great chief and warrior. His name was Iratumoana.

Often Tarakura toyed with his victim until the last aching breath lingered in their body.

He could smell the fetid stench of death on his breath and see his blood-encrusted talons.

Muscles rippled through his body as he rose from the swamp floor. His nostrils flared in annoyance. Then, recognising his enemy, his green eyes burned with hatred.

Iratumoana staggered to his feet. From the corner of his eye, he fixed on Tarakura. The taniwha approached him with deliberation. His eyes never left the warrior’s face. His sharp teeth showed in a grin. His breathing was shallow as he trod towards his prey, blood oozing from his wound.

Examples of text characteristics

SETTING THE TIME FRAME

Traditional stories frequently start with identifying the time frame, often in the distant past. This signals to readers that the story will tell an old, familiar story from long ago.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

*“the last aching breath lingered”
“the fetid stench of death”
“blood-encrusted talons”
“muscles rippled”
“nostrils flared in annoyance”
“burned with hatred”*

SENTENCE LENGTH

Varying the sentence length can add drama to a story. Short sentences give a sense of tension. Longer sentences can carry more descriptive detail. The sentence length can help readers follow the action; for example, short sentences can convey the feeling that the action is speeding up.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to ask questions of each other as they form their intentions for writing. They can use an agreed set of questions, such as:

- What is your purpose for writing?
- How will you structure your writing? Why?
- What sort of language will you use and why?

ASK QUESTIONS about the setting.

- Compare the start of this story with others that begin, “Long, long ago ...” or “Once upon a time ...”. Why do they start like this? What does it tell you about the setting?
- How will you convey your story’s setting to your readers?
- What models can you use?
- How will you help your readers to make connections with your story and its setting?
- How can you stress the importance of the setting?

PROMPT the students to experiment with adding drama and precision to their writing.

- How could adding vivid language help your readers to visualise a place, action, or feeling?
- How could descriptive language help your readers to understand the similarities or differences between characters?
- How can it help your readers understand the characters’ feelings?
- Are there places in your writing where vivid descriptions will make your meaning or purpose clearer?

MODEL some different ways to write sentences; for example, model breaking a long sentence up and noticing the effect. Alternatively, join short sentences and notice the effect.

- Listen as I read this extract aloud.
- Now listen as I read it with the sentences made longer:

“Iratumoana staggered to his feet and fixed on Tarakura from the corner of his eye as the taniwha approached him with deliberation. Tarakura never let his eyes leave the warrior’s face, and his sharp teeth showed in a grin.”

- Which version sounds better? What is the effect of keeping the sentences short?



If possible, show students a selection of graphic texts to demonstrate the effect of short sentences in a dramatic story.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve added some great descriptive language to this. It’s made your story a lot more dramatic and interesting.
- This works well as a graphic novel. The format limits the amount of writing, so every word has to count. You’ve trimmed your sentences down to short, vivid statements.

METACOGNITION

- How did clarifying your intentions with your partner before you started writing help you? Is this a strategy you would use again?
- What helped you make decisions about the kind of language to use? How is the language different from other writing you’ve done?
- What was the hardest part about writing this? What was easiest? Why?
- What have you learnt about this type of writing that will be helpful when writing for a different purpose?

 Writing standard: by the end of year 6
 The Literacy Learning Progressions