

The Patupaiarehe

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Overview

Three children are unconvinced by their parents' warnings about the patupaiarehe (Māori fairies) beyond the boundary fence – until one afternoon, they get lost.

This dramatic text is a great example of how an author can build tension. It is also rich with ideas about the boundaries between history, myth, and spirituality.

Suggested teaching purposes

- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategy of **analysing and synthesising**.
- To engage the students in reading and thinking about how authors create atmosphere and tension.

Suggested learning goal

I am learning to explore the techniques the author uses to build atmosphere and tension in this narrative text.

Success criteria

I will be successful when I have:

- identified the techniques
- plotted and discussed the effects of the techniques
- shared my personal response to the text.

Features of the text

What features of this text support the teaching purposes?

- The narrative text form, with a first-person narrator
- The ways the author builds tension and atmosphere, for example, by using:
 - an engaging opening, which conveys a sense of mystery with words like “unpredictable”, “rumour”, and “never seen again”
 - unnamed characters until the end of page 3 (except Mum and Dad)
 - multiple stories and warnings on pages 2 and 3 to emphasise the threat
 - language that foreshadows (or signals) events and mood changes, for example, “If it hadn’t been for”, “But even as we said it”, “It was at that very moment”
 - a situation where the children are on their own
 - conflicting responses to the patupaiarehe among the children (Ramari versus the others)
 - vivid imagery, for example, “twisted beneath masses of tangled, rusty hair”, “their eyes were red lights” (metaphor), “the shrill screech of Dad’s dog whistle cut sharply into the darkness”, “the waning moon was bathing everything in an eerie, phosphorescent glow”
 - clues that everything is going to be OK (for example, “She told us, later, when it was all over”), which ironically don’t necessarily deflate the

tension

- information on how the characters feel, including through the dialogue
- intensifiers, for example, “so heavy”, “so mad”, “deeper and deeper”, “too scared”, “so cold”
- dark, high-contrast illustrations (as in film noir)
- The historical information about fighting and deaths on the land, which also serves to increase the tension
- The elements of Māori and Christian belief systems
- The Māori words and concepts, for example, the idea of objects being tapu.

Readability

Noun frequency level: 9–10 years for guided reading

What prior knowledge or experience might help my students to read this text?

- Their knowledge of fairy tales or folklore
- Their experiences of being lost or in fog
- Their understanding of concepts like tapu or sacred
- Their familiarity with the features of narratives.

What text features might challenge my students and require a prompt or a brief explanation?

- The meaning and pronunciation of the title
- Particular words and concepts, including “unpredictable”, “Hīmatangi”, “coveted”, “inheritance”, “superstitious”, “taiaha”, “greenstone mere and stone adzes”, “freak out”, “dilly-dally”, “pikelets”, “piggyback”, “stagnant”, “no-man’s-land”, “lure”, “slumped”, “trance”, “shrill screech”, “emerging”, “waning”, “eerie”, “phosphorescent”.

Preparation for reading

Ask the students to do one of the following tasks the day before reading the text.

Introduce the task by telling the students you will be giving them a text about patupaiarehe (Māori fairies) to read.

- Read a well-known fable or myth (for example, The Three Little Pigs or Māui and the Sun). Have the students quickly sketch how the tension develops in the story. Make this a very brief task with little discussion.
- Read a myth that focuses on a creature of uncertain character. Discuss ideas about whether the creature is good, bad, or otherwise.
- Read “The Dare”, SJ 2.4.06 to introduce the sort of language used to create atmosphere and tension.

A framework for the lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the learning goal?

Before reading

- Briefly revisit the pre-reading task and review the features of narratives.
- Look at the title and share knowledge about patupaiarehe. “What other mythological creatures do you know about?” (Making connections)
- Locate Hīmatangi on a map and share knowledge and experiences of the place. You could introduce some of the information from the third paragraph.

Link to the importance of setting in a narrative. (Making connections)

- If necessary, review understandings of the concept of tapu. (Making connections)
- Share the learning goal and success criteria with the students.

During reading

Refer to Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8 , pages 80–93, for information about deliberate acts of teaching.

- Have the students read the story page by page. Give them photocopies of the text so that they can highlight features that build tension as they go. Also have them note down their personal response to the text. Support them with the vocabulary as necessary.
- Below are some specific things you may want to discuss.

Page 2

- Discuss how the author sets the scene – and uses conflict. “How do you think things will go in this story? What evidence can you find to support your thinking?” Discuss the sense of mystery and superstition, and words that contribute to creating this – for example, “unpredictable”, “rumour”, “never seen again”, “might have been making the whole story up”. (Analysing and synthesising; forming and testing hypotheses)

Page 3

- Discuss the level of tension. “What sentences signal that something bad is about to happen?” Also, discuss the effects on the atmosphere of what Mum says and the fact that the children are on their own. Notice that we find out the children’s names only at the end of page 3. (Analysing and synthesising)

Pages 4 and 5

- Discuss how the children don’t deliberately set out to get into trouble. Also talk about the character of Lilly – her awareness but also her role in worsening the problem. (Analysing and synthesising)
- Explore the effect of the vivid imagery (for example, “soft mud sucking around our ankles” and “sour smell of stagnant water”) and the foreshadowing language (for example, “It wasn’t that we didn’t listen to him” and “In fact, it had actually got worse”). (Analysing and synthesising)
- “Why are they scared before seeing anything scary? Why do you think only Ramari sees the patupaiarehe?” (Inferring)
- Read to the end of page 5. “How do you feel? Has the tension increased or decreased for you and why? What do you think is going to happen?” (Evaluating ideas and information; forming and testing hypotheses)

Page 6

- Draw attention to what Ramari says and the other children’s responses. “How do you feel and why? What’s your interpretation of the patupaiarehe?” (Analysing and synthesising)

Page 7

- Discuss why the other children tell Ramari not to make things up –

whether they don't believe her or do believe her but don't want to face up to this. (The words "But even as we said it" are relevant.) Also notice the italics ("we all felt that there was something out there") and draw out what they indicate. (Analysing and synthesising; inferring)

- Discuss the children's words as they get more scared, noticing the progression from mentioning their father and the dog to calling on God. "What does this tell us about how the characters are feeling?" (Analysing and synthesising)
- "What happens at the end of the page? Does the tension increase or decrease?" (Analysing and synthesising)

Page 8

- Have the students identify the sentence that signals a change in events and mood ("It was at that very moment that ..."). Prompt the students to notice the children's observations about the environment when the tension decreases (for example, "didn't seem so dark"). (Analysing and synthesising)

After reading

- Support the students with categorising the features and techniques they highlighted on their photocopies. Prompt them with questions like "How would you describe this feature?" This is an opportunity to introduce or revisit terms like foreshadowing, imagery, and so on. (Analysing and synthesising)
- Have the students plot the development of tension relative to the structure of the narrative, as in the diagram below. They could use a wiggly line to do so. Encourage them to note their personal responses along the line. (Analysing and synthesising)
- Explore in detail the language that foreshadows (or signals) events and mood changes. (See "Features of the text".) Add these crucial points onto the diagram. (Analysing and synthesising)
- Discuss the clues in the text that tell the reader that everything will work out in the end. These include the fact that the narrator has lived to tell the tale and the words "She told us, later, when it was all over" (page 6). "Did these things decrease the tension for you? Why do you think that is?" (Analysing and synthesising)
- Review the learning goal and success criteria and reflect with the students on how well the learning goal has been achieved. For example, "What have you learnt about how an author builds atmosphere and tension for the reader? When you read other texts, what will you be looking for? Which of these features would you like to try in your own writing?" Note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate their new learning?

The students could:

- independently explore the creation of tension in another *School Journal* text

(Analysing and synthesising; making connections)

- experiment with using some of the tension-building techniques in their own writing. (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)