

READING A BOAT

BY DON LONG • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADRIAN HEKE



Tobiah, Achilles, and Niko leaned over the rail and waved to their mum. She was standing on the wharf. Mum waved back. “Have a good time,” she called up to them.

It was the school holidays, and Gran was taking the boys on a ferry ride across the harbour. The sun shone brightly, and the sea was as flat as glass. “Perfect weather for a ferry trip!” Gran said as they climbed up to the top deck and found a seat.

They looked back at the city growing smaller behind them. Seagulls flew past, and the boys could see several other boats out on the water.

After a while, the boys went off to explore the ferry.
“Have you noticed how many signs there are on this boat?”
Niko said. “There must be hundreds!”

“Hundreds?” asked Achilles.

“Well heaps,” said Niko. “Have a look.”

He was right. There were lots of signs on the ferry.

“Do you think anyone ever reads this stuff?” Tobiah said.

“They’d better,” said Niko. “Look what that sign says – ‘Emergency exit’. You’d want to know where to go if there was an emergency.”

“Yeah, but that sign over there is only selling ice cream.”

“So how do you know which signs are important – and which aren’t?” asked Tobiah.

The boys asked Gran if they could use her cellphone to take photos of some of the signs. As they took the photos, they filed each one under “Important” and “Not important”.

The boys couldn’t agree on some of the signs. For example, Niko thought that “No smoking” was important, but Achilles wasn’t so sure.



“You don’t want to risk starting a fire on a ferry,”
Niko reasoned. “‘No smoking’ might be just good advice
somewhere else, but here it really matters.”

“OK, what about the recycling sign on that rubbish bin?
Recycling is really important,” said Archilles.

“It is,” Niko agreed, “but whether people put empty
bottles into that rubbish bin or not – well, that isn’t as
important as knowing where to find the emergency exit,
is it?”





The boys went back up on to the top deck.

“I never realised there were so many signs on the ferry,” said Gran when the boys showed her their photos.

“I know,” said Niko. “It’s almost like you need to be able to read a boat.”

“What about on shore?” asked Gran as the ferry came up to the wharf. “There are lots of signs on land too. Let’s have a look when we get off the ferry.”

Gran was right. The boys hadn’t really noticed before, but now they were looking, there seemed to be signs everywhere.

As they walked along the shore, the boys divided the signs they saw into two groups: important signs and signs that aren’t important. The advertising signs were easy. They were just trying to sell something. The road signs were easy, too. If you are driving a car towards an intersection, you really do have to stop.

“But what about that sign?” said Gran. “It says not to take too much kaimoana.”

“It’s important,” said Tobiah. “It says that there’s a fine if you take too much.”

“I don’t think it’s the fine that makes this sign important,” said Gran. “The kaimoana might disappear forever if people take too much. That’s what makes it important.”



They couldn't agree about the sign telling people when they could walk their dogs on the beach.

"But two against one," said Achilles. "Gran and I reckon it's important. Sometimes there might be lots of people on the beach. A dog could scare someone."

Everyone agreed that the "Underground cables" sign was important after Gran told them what it meant.

"So if anyone digs here, they could get fried?" said Niko.

"Exactly," said Gran.

That evening when the boys got home, Mum helped them to download the photos from Gran's phone. Then she helped them to send the photos to some of their school friends.

The boys told their friends about signs that were important and signs that weren't important. The boys challenged their friends to find a sign that they wouldn't be able to classify.

Here are some of the signs that their friends sent back:



The boys and Gran talked about each sign. Then the boys decided whether the sign was a "must read" or not. They texted their friends with their answers. The boys reckoned that they had been sent at least one "must read" – maybe three.

"Sometimes it depends who you are," Niko laughed. "CCTV cameras are in operation on these premises' is a must read for shoplifters and robbers!"



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by Don Long
photographs by Adrian Heke

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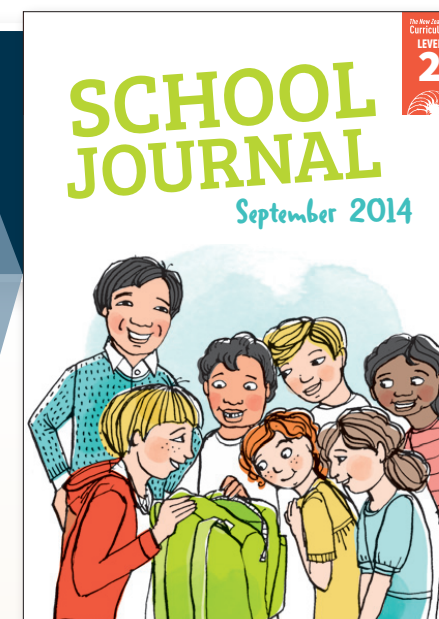
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