

The Rules



BY MARIA SAMUELA

“Tāviviki, hurry up. The shoppers are coming,” Uncle Joe called.

Matora hurried. He took a deep breath and tucked his violin under his chin. Slowly, he drew the bow away from his body and began playing “Yellow Bird”, his mum’s favourite song.

Matora hummed as he played, hearing the words in his head. *Yellow bird, up high in banana tree.* Some shoppers stopped to listen. Others stopped just long enough to throw coins into Matora’s case. Each clink made him smile.

At the end of the song, Uncle Joe went back to work. He’d said having a busker right outside his shop was good for business and he would match Matora’s earnings dollar for dollar. More importantly, he’d promised to keep Matora’s busking a secret. Uncle Joe didn’t know about the orchestra’s rules, and Matora wasn’t about to fill him in:

1. Don’t take your instrument out of the house except for rehearsals and concerts.
2. Don’t let other people play your instrument.
3. Keep your instrument in a safe place.

Matora busked all morning. He played every tune he knew. After he’d played them a first time, he played them all again. Just as he was starting Beethoven’s “Für Elise” for the third time, he spotted some of his mates. They’d been to rugby. Now they were pirouetting in a line towards him. Matora blushed and stopped.

“Keep playing,” Tommy yelled, his boots dangling around his neck. The three boys twirled and twisted, their faces contorted with fake emotion. The shoppers laughed, and Matora grinned and slipped the violin back under his chin.

Matora couldn’t wait until he had enough money saved up. He wanted to see the look on his mum’s face when he finally gave her the tickets. The Toru Maestros were hard case, just like his uncles. They mucked around on stage and made people laugh, although it wasn’t their jokes that Mum loved the best – it was their music. Classical music with Island style is how she described it. But the tickets were really expensive, and Matora didn’t have the money. Well, not *yet* he didn’t. It was OK. He still had a couple of months to earn it.



In his open case, Matoria could see a twenty-dollar note and two fives, not to mention all the coins. The number of Saturday-morning shoppers was steady, and they seemed relaxed and in a generous mood. Matoria loved playing his violin for the sake of it, but having an audience took things to the next level. And Pachelbel's "Canon in D Major" always got a big round of applause.

Matoria played the first few bars. He hit each note perfectly, like the string quartet that had played at Auntie Tilly's wedding. He imagined playing with them one day. Thinking of the quartet reminded Matoria of next week's concert at the community centre. He was really looking forward to it. They were playing with special guests whose identity was top secret. Even the kids in the orchestra weren't allowed to know.

Matoria's music seemed to reach the farthest corners of the shopping centre. Mr Savea came out of his fruit shop to listen and gave Matoria a wave when he'd finished. Matoria waved back. It was time to pack up. Mum was picking him up soon. She thought he was helping Uncle Joe in the shop.

As Matoria was folding up his music stand, he heard a voice.

"Score!" It was Sefa. What did *he* want? Surely Sefa wouldn't take his money, right there in the open. Matoria decided to ignore him. Besides, Sefa wasn't a thief. He was more into hassling people. Matoria made for Uncle Joe's shop, but Sefa cut in front of him. Without any warning, he snatched Matoria's violin and ran off, grinning.

Matoria sprinted after him. They ran through the shopping centre, over the pedestrian crossing, up to the bridge. Sefa stopped in the middle. He dangled the violin over the side.

"Dare me?" he teased.

Matoria felt icy panic. He looked down at the creek, then lurched for his violin, tripping and crashing into Sefa by mistake. The violin went flying.

Matoria peered down into the creek. The instrument lay on some rocks, the fingerboard snapped in two. Only the strings were keeping the pieces from floating apart. *The rules*, Matoria thought.

"It was an accident," Sefa mumbled. "You pushed me."





Matora scrambled down to the creek and picked up his ruined instrument. Slowly, he walked back to Uncle Joe's shop.

"Oh," said Uncle Joe when he saw the violin. "I don't think I can fix this." He looked to Matora for an explanation, but the shop's buzzer interrupted them. Matora didn't bother to turn around. He knew who it would be. His mum.

"Matora, what have you done?" she said.

Matora stared at the floor.

"I can't believe it! You took your violin out of the house."

Matora nodded.

"And then you broke it?"

Matora nodded again, even though technically *he* hadn't broken it. What did it matter? He'd broken the rules – that's what mattered now.

"The concert," Mum said, "it's next week. What will we do?"

"I don't know," said Matora. He hung his head, bracing himself for whatever came next.

"Don't be angry, sister," Uncle Joe said. "He wanted to surprise you." Uncle Joe told Mum about the Toru Maestro tickets, about Matora's busking. "He's a good boy," Uncle Joe said finally.

Matora forced himself to look his mother in the eye, just like she'd taught him. "I'm really sorry, Mum."



Matora stood and took a quick peek. The community centre was packed, but there were his mum and Uncle Joe, right there in the fifth row. They smiled and waved. Feeling better, Matora sat back down. He clutched his violin tightly. They'd made a deal with Uncle Joe. Matora had given him the busking money as a down payment on a new violin, and he'd work in the shop every Saturday to make up the rest. In the meantime, Matora's busking career was over.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mr Palepoi, the orchestra's conductor, began. "I know you're all eager to hear our children play ... and of course to meet our mystery guests." Behind them, Masina filled the air with a drumroll. "So, all the way from South Auckland, I give you the Toru Maestros!"

The audience cheered like crazy as the three tenors walked onto the stage. Matora couldn't believe it. It really was them. He wished he could see his mum's face, but there was no time to look. Mr Palepoi had raised his baton.

Matora put his violin under his chin and lifted the bow. The Toru Maestros – and Matora and all the other kids in the orchestra – began. *Yellow bird, up high in banana tree* – his mum's favourite song.



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by Maria Samuela

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Published 2015 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.

www.education.govt.nz

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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 0 478 16446 6 (online)

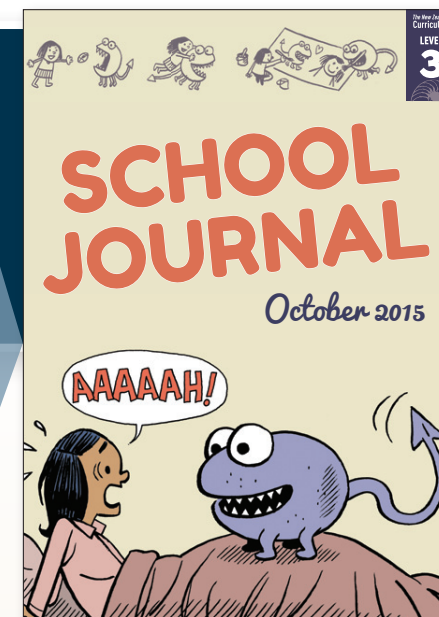
Publishing services: Lift Education E Tū

Editor: Susan Paris

Designer: Jodi Wicksteed

Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop

Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 3, OCTOBER 2015

Curriculum learning areas	English Social Sciences
Reading year level	Year 5
Keywords	bullying, busking, classical music, family, friendship, music, orchestras, responsibility, rules, tenors, violin