

## Overview

This TSM contains information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The material provides many opportunities for revisiting the text.

Jem Yoshioka was born and bred in New Zealand to New Zealand-born parents, so technically she only belongs to one place. But her Japanese ancestry is a living part of her. This graphic novel, written and drawn by Jem, explores a struggle we are all familiar with: that of seeking to understand who we are and where we belong. Rich in both written and visual imagery, this text invites multiple readings.

Be sensitive to your students when discussing the themes in this text. If students wish to share their own experiences of being mixed raced, ensure that they do so in a caring and supportive classroom environment. Some students may prefer to write their thoughts rather than discuss them.

This article:

- provides an opportunity to explore the issue of mixed races and identity
- includes themes of inclusion and difference
- has a graphic text format
- combines simple statements of fact with rich symbolism
- includes a haiku and a traditional Japanese woodblock print.

A PDF of the text is available at [www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz](http://www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz)

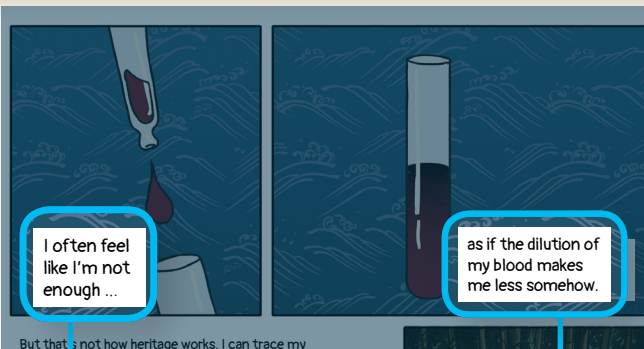
### Texts related by theme

“King Street Bridge” SJ L4 Oct 2013 | “Alvin and Me” SJ L3 May 2017 | “Mata i Pusi” SJ L4 May 2015 | “Afakasi Chameleon” SJ L4 May 2015

## Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

We have retained the links to the National Standards while a new assessment and reporting system is being developed.

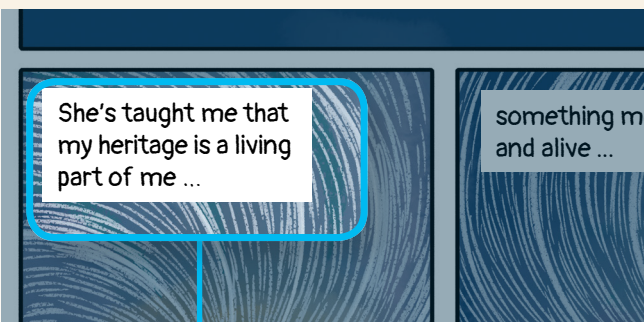
For more information on assessing and reporting in the post-National Standards era, see: <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-and-reporting-guide>



elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas



complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments



metaphor, analogy, and connotative language that is open to interpretation



illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text's content




Reading standard: by the end of year 8

## VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “technically”, “features are ambiguous”, “dreaded question”, “heritage”, “lineage”, “shrine”, “pursue”
- Similes, metaphors, and personification, including: “accent blends smoothly with the current of voices”, “I feel like a badly translated haiku that doesn’t mean the same in English”, “these tiny southern islands, not their sisters in the north”, “I feel lost”, “I often feel like I’m not enough ... as if the dilution of my blood makes me less somehow”, “the little bamboo town”, “my heritage is a living part of me ... something moving and alive ... a thing to pursue”
- Japanese names in the caption for the woodcut on page 44: “The Monkey Bridge in Kai Province”, “Utagawa Hiroshige”
- Words with more than one meaning, including “technically”, “cast”, and “current”

## Possible supporting strategies

- Identify words and phrases that are likely to be unfamiliar to your students.
- Tell the students that this is a short text, but it includes a lot of abstract ideas and interesting metaphors and images. Select an example to discuss and explain. Reassure the students that the writer intends us to stop and think about these ideas and they will have opportunities to talk them through and clarify their meaning. Provide sticky notes for the students to indicate words, phrases, or concepts they don’t understand and want to come back to.
- Check the pronunciation of the Japanese words, including the author’s name. You may have students or colleagues who can help, but if not, you can find advice online. Model correct pronunciation for the students and give them an opportunity to practise.  
 The following websites provide more on correct pronunciation.  
[Basic phrases to recognise sounds \(with audio\)](#)  
[How to pronounce Japanese words video](#)
- Use Google Maps to locate Japan and its relationship as New Zealand’s “sister islands”.
- Check that the students understand the meaning of “technically”, “cast”, and “current” in this context.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

## SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Some understanding that some people struggle with identity or feel that they are “not enough”
- Personal experiences of dealing with people’s assumptions about who they are, where they are from, and what they know
- Some awareness of the concepts of “heritage” and “lineage” and their importance for personal identity
- Some knowledge of the idea of being of mixed race and of how this affects appearance and the way people are judged
- Personal experience of being supported by an older family member to know and understand your heritage
- Some experience of reading graphic texts
- Some familiarity with texts that incorporate shifts in time to provide background information
- Some familiarity with Japan and its culture, including some knowledge of the significance of the rabbit as a symbol of good luck
- Familiarity with poetic structures and language

## Possible supporting strategies

- Help the students to make connections between the themes in the text and their own experiences. *Jem says that she feels there is a part of her that people misunderstand. Have you felt that way? Is it a feeling you’re aware of in other ways, for example, from other reading or watching movies? What do you think causes such misunderstandings? How does it impact on individual people and on relationships between people?*
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss, in pairs or small groups, the idea of being from a particular place. *Where is “home”? What does it mean? How many homes can one person have?*
- Unpack the family relationships that are mentioned, from Jem, to her parents, to her grandparents, and to her great-grandparents. Create Jem’s family tree and note the country where each generation was born. Connect this discussion to the third frame on page 46, which shows “how lineage works”. Discuss how the further we go back, the more people we are connected to. Take a moment for students to think, pair, and share about their own heritage and ethnicity. Students could sketch out some of their own family relationships.
- Provide some background to the Japanese context.
  - Most students will have heard of the “man in the moon”. Some students, particularly those with an Asian background, may know a version of the legend of the moon rabbit, or Gyokuto. In the Japanese version, the rabbit was placed in the moon as reward for an act of compassion in which he sacrificed his life to save a stranger. Explain that the writer has included the rabbit as a motif to represent Japanese culture. Allow students to share other legends about the moon from their culture.
  - Invite the students to share what they know about haiku. Draw out or feed in that it is a Japanese poetic form and the typical structure is three lines with five, seven, and five syllables. Explain that Basho is regarded as one of Japan’s greatest poets and a master of haiku. Share some other haiku poems, particularly focusing on the image created in the first two lines and how that image relates to the surprise in the last line.
  - Explain that the print on page 44 was made in the 1850s by a famous Japanese artist. It is one of a series of prints he made of famous landscapes from each of the sixty-eight provinces that were then in existence.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- The graphic novel format, where meaning is conveyed through the illustrations as well as the text
- The abstract and metaphorical ideas and images, including this sophisticated example: “I feel like a badly translated haiku that doesn’t mean the same in English”
- The first-person narration
- The symbols of Japanese culture, culminating in the imagery of the rabbit, to show that her Japanese heritage is part of Jem
- The flights of fancy, with Jen appearing as a samurai warrior and a robot
- The combination of the explicit (for example, “But still, there is this part of me that people misunderstand”) and the abstract (for example, “They want to dress me up in armour and swords and blood ... or cast me in chrome as the product of some imaginary superfuture”)
- The shifts in time between the present, the past, and the distance past
- The inclusion of a haiku and its illustration with a woodblock print
- The use of italics to indicate emphasis (“*really*”)

## Possible supporting strategies

- Prompt students’ prior knowledge of the graphic novel format. Check that they know how to read the panels in a left to right, zigzag direction.
- If necessary, clarify that a comic book format is not used only for humour and entertainment. It can be used for many other purposes. When a comic book format is used, and it’s not a regular periodical, we tend to use the term “graphic novel”.
- Encourage the students to explore the information in the illustrations and explain how to work with the text to make meaning. Model this by thinking aloud. *The first word is “technically”. I know that technically can be used in the sense of something being technically perfect, such as a gymnast performing a routine to perfection. But it can also be used to suggest that something is not quite correct, given a particular situation. Jem says she’s technically from one place, and it’s obvious from the picture that the place is New Zealand. But when I look at the other frames, I can see pictures of Japanese people and of Mount Fuji, which is a famous mountain in Japan. In the first frame, I can also see a pattern that looks like waves or Japanese fans. So, I’m going to guess that the writer is from New Zealand but she has connections to a place across the sea, and that place is Japan.*
- Check that the students understand that the frames in a comic book don’t stand by themselves. *Where can you see sets of frames that work together to convey an idea? What are these ideas?*
- Prompt the students to notice how the story is told – as a first-person narrative with pictures. There is no dialogue. The writer speaks directly to the reader, and from her heart, about how she thinks and feels. On the other hand, we still need to make inferences to draw meaning from her metaphorical language and from the illustrations, which carry considerable detail. *How might this combination affect the way you approach this text?*
- Discuss the ways metaphors and analogies can be used to carry an idea. Share the story of the moon rabbit (see “Specific knowledge required”, page 2 of these notes). Prompt the students to track where the rabbit appears and how Jem uses it to symbolise her culture.
- Discuss the use of the italics for emphasis. *We know from the quotation marks that this is someone speaking to Jem. How do you think they speak? Try saying it aloud.*



Sounds and Words

## Possible curriculum contexts

### ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

### ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

### HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Level 4 – Personal Health and Physical Development: Personal identity: Describe how social messages and stereotypes, including those in the media, can affect feelings of self-worth.

### SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 4 – Understand how people pass on and sustain culture and heritage for different reasons and that this has consequences for people.

### Possible first reading purpose

- To find out how the author feels about her Japanese cultural heritage.

### Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To identify the reasons for the author’s personal conflict
- To explore the metaphorical references in the text
- To evaluate the author’s presentation and message through her combination of text and images.

### Possible writing purposes

- To respond to the author’s story by describing your own cultural experiences
- To create a story of your life through graphic format
- To write a response describing the impact that grandparents or other relatives have had in your life.




The New Zealand Curriculum

### First reading

- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Explain that the text is written by a comic book artist and that it is a true account of her experiences and feelings as she deals with questions about her personal identity. Have the students talk with a partner about graphic novels or comics they have read. *What are their key features? What do you know about how to read them? What do you like about them?*
- Discuss the concept of identity and the challenges we can face when working out who we are and where we belong. Point out the writer's name and the fourth frame, where we see what she looks like. *What would you guess about Jem from seeing her picture and reading her name? What additional challenges might someone face if their parents are of mixed race?*
- Point out the title and prompt the students to wonder what might be "alive".
- Have the students read the first two pages and summarise Jem's concerns. Check that they understand why people might want to dress Jem up "in armour and swords and blood" or "cast" her "in chrome as the product of some imaginary superfuture". *What references are these people are making? What are they assuming about Jem? Where do expressions like "dress me up" or "cast me" come from? Are these people seeing the real Jem? How do you suppose that makes her feel? What is a haiku? Why is the image of a "badly translated haiku" good for describing how Jem feels?*
- If appropriate, have the students read the rest of the text by themselves. If they need more support, break it into chunks, allowing time for response and discussion.
- As the students read, encourage them to use sticky notes to identify abstract ideas, figurative language, and visual symbols, as well any other features that puzzle or interest them.

### If the students require more scaffolding

- Remind the students of strategies that are particularly useful on a first reading, such as reading on, using the context, rereading, and making connections with their prior knowledge. Select from the following approaches, depending on the students' needs.
- Clarify the concepts and imagery where necessary.
- Explain that as the students read, they will notice that we are learning a lot about other people's expectations of Jem and of how these expectations make her feel. We are told about these expectations both directly and indirectly. Prompt the students to notice the example on page 1. *Jem says "I rarely get the dreaded question, 'No, where are you really from?'" What are people implying when they ask this question? How does it make Jem feel? What words tells you that?*
- Prompt the students to compare Jem's "ambiguous features" with her father's "Japanese face". Check that the students understand what these statements mean and how they might affect the way people interact with Jem and her father. *Jem says that her Dad has "no choice". I wonder what she means by that. No choice about what?*
- Create a chart to record the students' inferences about people's expectations and judgments of Jem, how they are communicated, and how they make her feel. Make sure to include Jem's grandmother as well as the unnamed people Jem meets.  
 Students could use a [Google Doc](#) so that the chart can be constructed collaboratively and projected for the whole class to see.
- Focus on the use of the word "current" with its multiple meanings. "Current" can mean belonging to the present time, a body of water or air that is moving in a particular direction, or a flow of electricity. *Which meaning do you think is relevant in this context? What clues are there in the surrounding frames? So, what does it mean when Jem says, "My accent blends smoothly with the current of voices around me"?*
- Explain that both the picture and the haiku are by famous Japanese artists. If necessary, explain the form of a haiku. Take time to unpack the meaning and structure of this haiku and how it connects with the image shown in the print. Students may notice that the haiku does not quite fit the expected 5–7–5 syllable structure. It is, however, beautiful and meaningful. Have them reread the previous frame and reflect on the idea of a "badly translated haiku". Invite discussion about why Jem has included the print and the haiku. *What effect do they have on you as a reader? What feelings do they convey? What do you think the message is? Jem is also present on the page with the print. Where is she looking? What is interesting about the way she is portrayed? What might she be thinking? Let's keep those thoughts in mind as we continue to read.*



**Subsequent readings** How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose. Where possible, have the students work in pairs to discuss the questions and prompts in this section.

## The teacher

Discuss what the students understand as the central conflict that the author experiences. Start by encouraging the students to find a statement and a visual image that resonates for them. Note that there is no right or wrong answer here – different students will have been affected differently by different ideas. Use questioning to help the students select their examples and explain their choices.

- *What, in your opinion, is the most powerful statement Jem makes in words – a statement that captures how she feels?*
- *How would you describe this feeling? Is it something you have experienced?*
- *What causes this feeling for Jem?*
- *Now do the same for the images. Which picture stood out for you as capturing the struggles she is having? What does this picture add to your understanding of what Jem experiences as a part-Japanese New Zealander?*
- *With everything we have discussed, how could we summarise the central conflict Jem experiences?*
- *How does Jem cope with this sense of conflict?*
- *Do you think Jem has resolved her conflict? What makes you say that?*

Working in pairs, have the students create mind maps to show what the conflict is, what is causing the sense of conflict, and what Jem does to get through it. To deepen the discussion, you might then match each pair with another pair and have the groups compare and discuss their mind maps.

Prompt the students to consider if there are things they could learn from Jem about how to deal with challenges to their sense of identity.

- *Are there things that Jem does that you also do as part of understanding your own heritage?*
- *Are there things you might like to try in the future?*

## The teacher

Using the students' sticky notes, work together as a class to record the abstract ideas, figurative language, and visual symbols on a chart. Develop explanations for these and record them on the chart. Review the chart and ask questions to help the students recognise how meaning is created through the imagery of the words and the pictures.

- *Where does the image of dressing Jem up in armour and swords and blood come from? How do we see this reflected in the picture? Looking at the picture, how realistic or fair do you think this desire is?*
- *What do you think of the symbolism of the rabbit? Why do you think Jem chose it? How appropriate do you think it is?*

## The teacher

Prompt the students to evaluate the merits of using a graphic novel format to communicate a deeply felt inner conflict.

- *How did this picture help you understand what she feels? What are the words it helps to illuminate? How does it do this?*
- *How did you respond to the inclusion of the print? Did it make sense to you?*
- *Is there a combination of writing and visual imagery that you think is particularly effective? Why do you think that?*
- *Taking the text as a whole, how do the pictures add to the words? How well would this text work if the pictures weren't there?*

## METACOGNITION

- *How did your own experiences help you understand the writer's message? If you don't share similar feelings, what other sorts of experiences might you be able to draw on?*

## The students:

- revisit the text to locate a statement and an image that powerfully convey the sense of conflict Jem is experiencing
- discuss their selections
- write a statement that summarises the central conflict
- create a diagram to capture and organise their thinking about the causes of Jem's inner conflict and the way she deals with it
- make connections between Jem's experiences of seeking her identity and their own experiences
- think about whether there are lessons in the text that they could apply to their own lives
- could complete a three-level guide like the one at the end of this TSM to help them think more deeply about the text.

Three level guides help students read texts closely and infer meaning. (See the example on page 8 of these TSM.) The guide is a series of statements about the text, some true and some false. There are three levels of statements: literal (on the lines), inferential (between the lines), and applied (beyond the lines). Another way of thinking about the levels is literal (the author said it), inferential (the author meant it), and applied (the author would agree with it.)

Students write true or false next to each statement and then share their answers with a partner. If they disagree on any statement, they discuss their answers and try to reach agreement. Finally, students discuss their answers as a whole group or class, focusing particularly on the applied statements that explore the theme of the text.

## The students:

- explore the metaphorical references
- make connections between the text, the imagery, and their prior knowledge as they identify and explore the abstract ideas, figurative language, and visual symbols in the text.

## The students:

- reflect on the relative importance of the visual and written text
- evaluate the effectiveness of using the graphic novel format to share a personal story.

## GIVE FEEDBACK

- *I noticed how closely you looked at the pictures to pick up clues and how you used inference to interpret them. You helped us see how the calligraphy developed from the frame saying "I'm learning" to the one saying "I'm trying". You inferred that she must be learning how to write in Japanese as well as how to read it.*



Reading standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 4 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

## Text excerpts from “Something Alive”

## Examples of text characteristics

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

She’s taught me that my heritage is a living part of me ...

### CULTURAL SYMBOLS

*A cultural symbol is a physical representation of a particular culture – its stories, traditions and beliefs. This means that if we understand the symbols of a culture, we can start to understand its people. If we understand and embrace the symbols associated with our own cultural groups, we also understand and embrace parts of what makes us uniquely us.*


Explain that Jem uses the moon rabbit as a symbol of the heritage she shares with her ancestors. If you haven’t already done so, share the story of the moon rabbit and discuss why Jem chose this symbol. Present some images of other familiar cultural symbols and discuss what they mean. Prompt the students to share other examples they know and explain what they represent. Allow the students time to reflect on their own culture and the symbols that represent it. Support them to select a symbol that means something to them, draw it, and write an explanation.

- *If you were to choose a symbol to represent your heritage, what might it be?*
- *What does this symbol mean?*
- *Do you remember how you came to know about this symbol ... or did you just “always know it”?*
- *How does it reflect your culture?*
- *If you were to explain this symbol to someone, what would you want them to know about it?*

I was born in New Zealand, as were both my parents.

### GRAPHIC NOVEL

*A graphic novel is a book that is made up of comic book content. The word “novel” usually refers to long works of fiction, but the word “graphic novel” is used more broadly and can include fiction and non-fiction. The term “comic book” is used more often for periodicals.*

Have the students use comic strip frames to create a narrative of a personal experience. You could suggest that, unlike Jem, they might incorporate speech bubbles. They could also include a cultural symbol and link this to an incident that says something about their culture, for example, a time when they learnt something about their cultural heritage from a family member or friend. Students could draw their graphic novels by hand.  Alternatively, they could use a free online comic creation tool, such as [Pixton](#), [Toondoo](#), or [Storyboard](#). Whichever approach they take, they need to start by planning their stories. In particular, they need to know how their story will end!

No one travels  
Along this way but I,  
This autumn evening.  
– Basho

### HAIKU

*Haiku are a traditional Japanese form of poetry. Haiku are characterised by their 5–7–5 syllable pattern, but this isn’t a rule that needs to be kept. The important thing about a haiku is that it uses simple, sensory language to capture a brief moment in time.*

*A haiku can be described as a “mood poem”. It creates a mental image without using metaphors or similes. Instead of saying how she or he feels, the writer describes details in the scene that gave that feeling.*

*There is usually a division within a haiku, with the first two lines focusing on one thing and the final line on another. The relationship between these two parts can be surprising.*

Read some more haiku with the students. Include examples that follow the traditional structure and others that use a slightly different structure. Take time to appreciate them. Have them discuss the following questions in pairs.

- *What do you see when we read this haiku aloud?*
- *What does it make you think about?*
- *How does it make you feel?*
- *How does it sound when it’s read aloud?*
- *What do you notice about its structure?*

Explain that haiku traditionally describe subjects from the natural world, such as the seasons, months, and animals. However, as modern poets, the students don’t need to be limited by this. Help them choose topics for their own haiku by looking at pictures of the natural world or by going for a walk and then brainstorming a list of possibilities.

When the students have chosen their topics, encourage them to make a list of related words. The words should be as descriptive as possible and address feelings and emotions, as well as the senses.

Have the students write the first two lines of their haiku. At this stage, their focus should be on creating evocative descriptions, not on counting syllables.

Explain that the last line is often used to make an observation about the subject.

- *Can you add a surprise here? Something completely different from the first two lines?*
- *Looking through your list of words, can you see some interesting relationships?*

Text excerpts from  
“Something Alive”

Examples of text  
characteristics

Teacher  
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Have the students rewrite their poems, using the 5–7–5-syllable format. Encourage the students to be creative, not only with their words, but with their punctuation and sentence structure. If necessary, they can tamper with the structure. To practise syllable counting, the students could clap each beat in their names, then move on to other words.

English language learners may find creating a picturesque phrase difficult because of their limited English vocabulary. Brainstorm words together as a group on a familiar subject, then have the students use that topic for their haiku. You could model writing haiku and also create some collaboratively with the students before they write their own. Some English language learners may prefer to work in small groups or use a text frame to write their haiku.

When the students are happy with their haiku, they might publish them on a class Google Doc so that others can enjoy their creativity.

#### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *I liked your first draft of your haiku, but when you revised it and used the thesaurus to explore alternative words, it went up another notch. Your word choices are fascinating and help me picture where you are and what you are looking at.*

#### METACOGNITION

- *I noticed that you seemed a bit conflicted about your symbol. Why was that? Did writing the explanation help you to work through that?*
- *Tell me what you did to link ideas across your graphic novel.*



Writing standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions

# “Something Alive” Three- level guide

Write true or false next to each statement. Be prepared to justify your answer to a partner. You may like to write the page number of the text where you found your evidence next to your answer.

## Level 1

1. Jem’s father was born in New Zealand to Japanese parents and her mother is a Kiwi with no Japanese heritage.
  2. Jem sounds different from other New Zealanders when she speaks.
  3. Looking at Jem, it is difficult for other people to tell what her ethnicity is.
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## Level 2

4. Jem’s father gets tired of explaining to people that he is a second-generation New Zealander.
  5. Jem enjoys the attention she gets by looking a little bit different from everyone else and the questions people ask her about Japan.
  6. Jem feels she needs to find her own individual path to understanding who she is as a New Zealander of mixed-raced heritage.
- 

## Level 3

7. Knowing your family history is important to who you are as a person.
8. New Zealand is a better place because we have many different people from diverse cultures and ethnicities living here.
9. We would all be better people if we learnt more about our own unique culture.
10. Being of mixed-race heritage is a real strength.