

Tokotoko

what they don't tell you is
it took thousands of us to make you
let the vines grow and then
braid them together

you could be a tokotoko
they'll hold you to count the seasons
back to that first separation
worn smooth in some spots

others never even carved at all
we may not be sure what is missing there
but gaps are okay
gaps are where we keep all the stories

whakapapa is where you're from
it's who you are
when time winds back on itself
in double helixes

the strands our tūpuna carried
all the way from Hawaiki
twisting branches that
we can hold to remember

everything that came before.

Kōtuku Titihuia Nuttall

illustration by Isobel Joy Te Aho-White

NOTE:

Tokotoko are ceremonial walking sticks. On a marae especially, they are a symbol of a person's mana and right to speak. Many tokotoko are carved to represent whakapapa. Some tokotoko trace tūpuna all the way back to Hawaiki. The separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku is also important to Kōtuku's poem. It refers to the creation story in which Tāne separates his parents, allowing light into the world – Te Ao Mārama.

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by Kōtuku Titihuia Nuttall

illustration by Isobel Joy Te Aho-White

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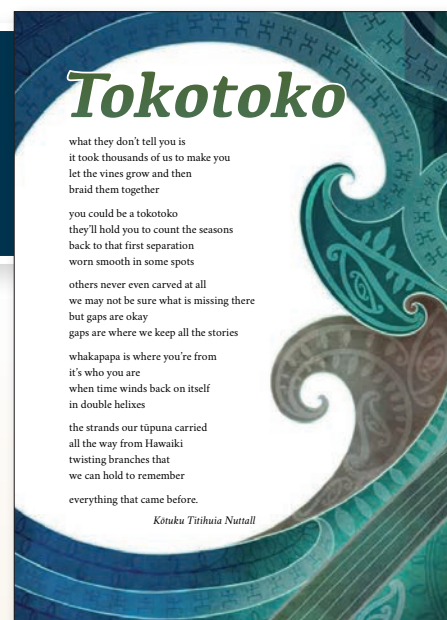
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