

A Gift for Aunty Ngā

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Overview

In this sequel to *A Quilt for Kiri* (Purple), Kiri visits Rarotonga with her parents to meet Aunty Ngā and gives her a tīvaevae that she and her mother have made. This is a rich personal-experience narrative with many layers of meaning, which lends itself to expressive reading and can be returned to many times. These notes include background information about tīvaevae and some aspects of Cook Islands culture.

Suggested purposes

This text provides an opportunity for the children to discuss their experiences of having family members who live far away and to share their own cultural practices. It supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, inferring, identifying main ideas, and identifying points of view.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the emotional content
- the relationship between Kiri and Aunty Ngā
- the different points of view of the characters
- the expressive illustrations
- the information presented about Rarotongan life
- the cultural importance of:
- the relatively complex narrative structure:
- the many links to *A Quilt for Kiri*
- the indicators of time – “one day”, “On Monday nights”, “At the next tīvaevae night”, “The next month”, “in the middle of the night”, “early the next morning”, “One Saturday”, “on the last morning”
- the inclusion of dialogue
- the colloquial language on page 5 – “just stick with me”
- the metaphor “every stitch is filled with love”
- the use of a dash and ellipsis on page 5 to emphasise the idea of large numbers of people and the use of dashes on pages 5 and 10 to indicate additional information
- the italics for emphasis on page 7
- the repetition of “Everyone” for effect on pages 12 and 14
- the irregular past-tense verbs – “brought”, “burst”, “flew”, “kept”, “made”, “sang”, “sent”, “taught”, “threw”, “told”, “woke”
- the map and pronunciation guide inside the front cover

- the use of macrons to denote long vowels
- the silent letters in “listening” and “island”
- the “le” in “gentle”, “middle”, “people”
- the prefix “un” in “unwrap”.
- social gatherings and providing food for guests
- the giving and receiving of gifts
- the art of tīvaevae
- the many changes in time and place
- the explanation about the quilt on page 3
- the sub-plot of the other family leaving the Cook Islands

Possible challenges

- the Cook Islands Māori words
- the meanings of “grace” and “minister”
- the many changes of time and place.

Introducing the text

You may find it helpful to have read the background information at the end of these notes so that you can feed it in if needed.

Read or retell *A Quilt for Kiri* to the children. Have a close look at the illustrations of the quilt and talk about how the quilts are made (shown on the title page). Encourage the children to share their knowledge of quilts or tīvaevae. Explain that tīvaevae are often given away on special occasions as treasured gifts. *Who do you think might have sent the quilt to Kiri?* Tell the children you have a book for them to read that follows on from *A Quilt for Kiri* that will tell them more about Kiri’s family.

During the reading

Clarify who the people in the cover illustration are and the setting. Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator. Explain the purpose of the macron in “Ngā”. *What do you think the gift might be?*

Look at the map inside the front cover and explain that, in this book, Kiri and her family travel from New Zealand to Rarotonga. *Have you ever been to the Cook Islands (or to another Pacific island)? Why do you think Kiri’s family have travelled there?*

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties.

Page 2 – *How do Kiri’s family keep in touch with Aunt Ngā? What does Mum think of Kiri’s idea? How do you know?*

Page 3 – Clarify that the text on page 3 is explaining why the quilt is special. If necessary, model the pronunciation of “tīvaevae”. *Why had it taken them such a long time to make it?*

Page 4 – *Why were the other mums and grandmas surprised? Do you think Mum and Kiri should give the tīvaevae to Aunty Ngā?*

Page 5 – Check that the children understand that a month has passed since the events of the previous page. Draw attention to the use of the dash and ellipsis to emphasise the idea of many people waiting to greet them. *Has this ever happened to you? How did you feel? What does Aunty Ngā say to Kiri?* Remind the children that Kiri and Aunty Ngā don't see each other very often (implied on page 2) so that this trip is an opportunity for them to get to know each other.

Page 6 – Encourage the children to examine the illustrations and share what they know about life on a Pacific island. Draw out the idea that there's a lot for Kiri to explore and find out about. *Who is helping her? Why does Aunty Ngā use a "gentle" voice?*

Page 7 – *How does the writer want you to read the first sentence?* Note that this page conveys the idea of time passing.

Pages 8 and 9 – If necessary, explain the terms "minister" and "grace". *How do these people feel about each other? How do you know?* Note the mention of another family that is about to travel to New Zealand.

Page 10 – *Who are the people dancing?* The illustration on this page supports the idea that Dad and Aunty Ngā are brother and sister. Help the children develop their understanding of the mixed emotions of the characters. *How do the characters feel here? Are there people in your family who live far away? How do you feel when you have to say goodbye to them?*

Page 11 – *How are the characters sharing their ideas here? Why does Mum squeeze Kiri's hand? What are they going to do?*

Page 12 – Note the two short sentences that slow the pace and suggest that something special is about to happen. Clarify that Dad is referring to what happened in *A Quilt for Kiri* and that it was Aunty Ngā who sent the quilt to her.

Page 13 – *Can a stitch really be "filled with love"? Why did Mum burst into tears?*

Page 14 – Note the links to *A Quilt for Kiri*. *Why is the song Dad is singing so special? Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time?*

Page 15 – There has been another shift in time.

Page 16 – *What does Aunty Ngā mean when she says the quilt will keep Kiri close to her? How is Kiri feeling? How did this book make you feel?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children read the text with a partner, observing their use of expression and the strategies they use to manage challenges in the text.

Clarify the children's understanding of the main ideas in the text and of the narrative structure by creating a timeline of events. You could extend this by adding in the previous events from *A Quilt for Kiri*.

Track the relationship between Kiri and Aunty Ngā. *How did they get to know each other?* Encourage the children to share their experiences of getting to know relatives they don't see very often.

Talk about the reasons people might live far away from their families.

Compare the quilts in *A Quilt for Kiri* and *A Gift for Aunty Ngā*. Why have Kiri and her mother decided to decorate their tīvaevae this way? Draw out the idea that tīvaevae patterns reflect the environment of the women who sew them. Talk about why the tīvaevae is such a special gift. What special way does the writer describe it on page 13? Clarify the idea that Kiri and her mum are returning the favour of Aunty Ngā sending Grandma's quilt to Kiri. There is also a subtext here about Mum deciding to adopt the Cook Islands custom of giving the tīvaevae away.

Identify the indicators of time in the text and talk about how they help the reader follow the sequence of events. You could also talk about how the use of a variety of alternatives to "and then" makes writing sound more interesting.

Focus on the irregular past-tense verbs. Remind the children that some verbs can't have "ed" added to them and that they need to use their knowledge of spoken English to help them when they're reading. Does "threwed" sound right? Or "bringed"? For ESOL children, who are less likely to be able to draw on their knowledge of English syntax, model the use of these irregular verbs in subsequent conversations.

Focus on the silent letters in "island" and "listening". Remind the children that there are some words that are tricky to spell and that the children will just need to learn them.

Write the words "gentle", "middle", and "people" on the whiteboard and read them together. Draw out the idea that the "le" at the end of these words is pronounced "ill". Explain that sometimes words sound different from how they are spelt.

Focus on the prefix "un" in the word "unwrap". Think of other sets of opposites that are formed by adding "un", such as "undo", "unhappy", or "unusual".

Suggestions for further tasks

Reread *A Quilt for Kiri*.

Have the children write a postcard or letter or send an audiotape to a family member they don't see very often.

On a world map, trace the children's links to family members who live overseas.

Find out about special gifts (taonga) in other cultures.

Find out more about tīvaevae and/or other Pasifika art forms. Have books available in the class library.

Invite a Cook Islands women's group to display and talk about their tīvaevae with the class.

Explore the idea of symmetry and patterns in quilts. The children could cut out a simple shape of a flower, leaf, or fish (using the illustration on page 7 for inspiration) and experiment with rotation and reflection to create a symmetrical pattern.

Background information

Tīvaevae are Pacific quilts and bedcovers put together in either appliqué or patchwork and involving long hours of sewing. The wives of missionaries taught the Cook Islands women the art of embroidery. Cook Islands women have made this craft their own, and today, tīvaevae is one of the great Pasifika art forms.

Tīvaevae are made up of distinctive patterns that are unique to each island and that usually reflect the identity of the designer or owner. The illustrator of *A Quilt for Kiri* and *A Gift for Aunty Ngā* has designed a new pattern for the tīvaevae in each of these books. In this book, Kiri and her mum have a pattern that features the pōhutukawa flower. Flowers play a very important part in the lives of Cook Islands people and often feature in tīvaevae patterns.

Making tīvaevae is a group effort by women working together in a “pange” or “ou” (as shown on page 4) until every woman in the group ends up with her own tīvaevae.

The giving of the quilt to a loved and valued person is the final act for a completed tīvaevae. They are often presented on special occasions, such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies, and funerals. In the Cook Islands, people are sometimes wrapped in tīvaevae when they are buried.

A Gift for Aunty Ngā conveys the idea of “returning the favour”. Cook Islands people do not have an equivalent for “thank you”, although the word “meitaki” (good) may be used. Thanks are usually expressed through body language or an act of kindness. The idea of returning a favour or reciprocating hospitality is a way that Cook Islands and Pasifika people have of keeping their “connectedness” with family and friends. A kind act is always remembered and returned when the opportunity presents itself.