

Mossie

by Tira Johnson



Riki didn't want lunch. His puku was feeling weird – all tight and jumpy. It had jumped all the way to school as he walked behind his cousin Tu. It had jumped when he stood in front of his new teacher, and it had jumped when he sat down in his new class.

Riki chewed the corner of a sandwich and put it back in his lunchbox. Luckily, Tu was hungry. He gulped all of his lunch and then ate Riki's too.

“Come on, cuz,” said Tu, standing up and brushing off the crumbs. “It's lunchtime – rugby!”

They dumped their lunchboxes, and Riki followed Tu onto the field. A big group of kids were throwing a ball around. There were boys and girls. There were a lot of big kids and a few small ones. Riki watched them run, step, and pass. They yelled when someone was touched and groaned when someone tried to be tricky and got tagged anyway.

A few boys stopped in front of Tu and Riki.

“Guys, this is my cuddie Riki. He's staying at my place. He just started school today.”

Tu pointed to each boy and said their names quickly. The first name was “Tama”. That was clear. Riki had no problem with Māori names. But the others sounded like “Silly” and “Woolly”. Riki knew that couldn't be right.

The problem was he was having trouble understanding what people were saying. It seemed like everyone talked too fast and with their mouths only half-open. Anyway, even if he could understand, he'd never remember everyone's names. There were too many of them. The faces and names were starting to blur together.



“Where are you from?” asked Tama.

Riki swallowed. “Brisbane.”

Tama looked puzzled. “Breeze Bin? Where’s that? The South Island?”

Tu laughed. “It’s in Aussie. Riki’s a Mossie.”

“A Mossie?” said Sili, grinning. “He doesn’t look like a bug.”

The boys snorted and laughed and slapped their legs. Riki laughed, too, but Tu shook his head.

“Don’t be a spoon. He’s a Māori from Aussie. Get it? A Māori from Aussie ... a Mossie!”

The other boys said, “Ahhh,” but Tama looked confused. “That can’t be right,” he said. “Māori don’t come from Aussie. We’re from here.”

“Nah,” said Riki, shaking his head. “My whānau are from *here*, but we were living over *there*. There were heaps of us. Even my koro and nanny live in Australia.”

“OK, sweet as,” said Willie. “But can you play rugby? My dad says Aussies can’t play rugby.”

Tu blew in his face. “Whatever. I told you he’s a Mossie, and he’s my cousin.”

“Yeah, and there are Mossies in all the Australian teams,” said Riki. “Rugby and league!”

“That’s true – and heaps of PIs too,” said Sili.

“OK,” said Tama, shrugging. “But you have to kōrero Māori to play in our team. We do everything in Māori. If I call ‘mauī’, then you’ve got to know ...”

“To the left!” interrupted Riki with a grin.

Tama looked surprised. “Um ... te taha matau?”

“To the right!” said Riki.

Tama narrowed his eyes, took a deep breath, and said very quickly, “E oma?”

“Run!”

“Whiua?”

“Throw it!”

“Hopukina?”

“Catch it!”

“Whanaia?”

“Kick it!”

“Tukuna mai?”

“Pass it to me!”

“Tukuna atu?”

“Pass it out!”

“Rutua?”

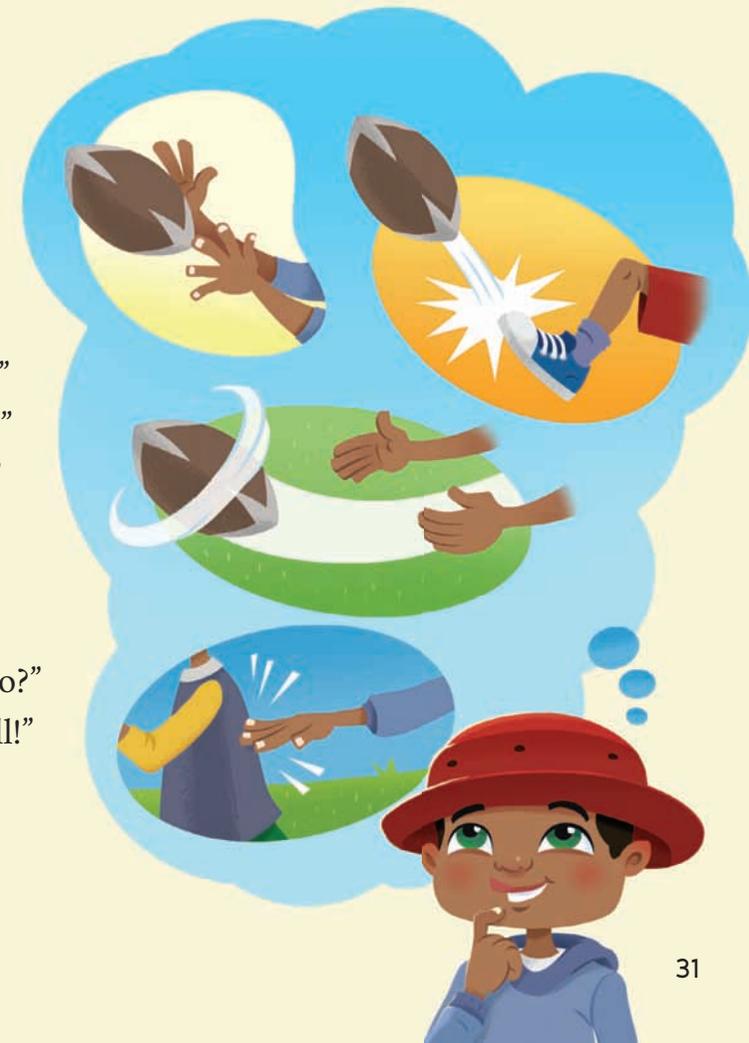
“Tackle!”

“Whāia te pōro?”

“Chase the ball!”

“Kia kaha?”

“Go hard!”



Tama stopped, eyes wide and mouth half-open.
The other boys laughed.

“E koe!” said Riki. “I might be a Mossie, but I went to kōhanga reo and kapa haka. My whānau had an awesome kī-o-rahi team too.”

“Kī-o-rahi?” said Willie. “I’ve heard about that, but no one at our school knows how to play it.”

“I can show you,” said Riki. “It’s easy, and it’s all in te reo Māori, too.”

“Kia tere!” said Tu. “Stop mucking around. The bell will go, and we’ll still be talking.”

The boys whooped and ran onto the field. Riki’s puku wasn’t feeling weird any more – just a little hungry. He sprinted to catch up with Tu.

“Maybe I shouldn’t tell them ...” whispered Riki.

“Tell them what?” asked Tu.

“I like playing rugby,” smiled Riki, “but Aussie Rules is better!”



illustrations by Scott Pearson

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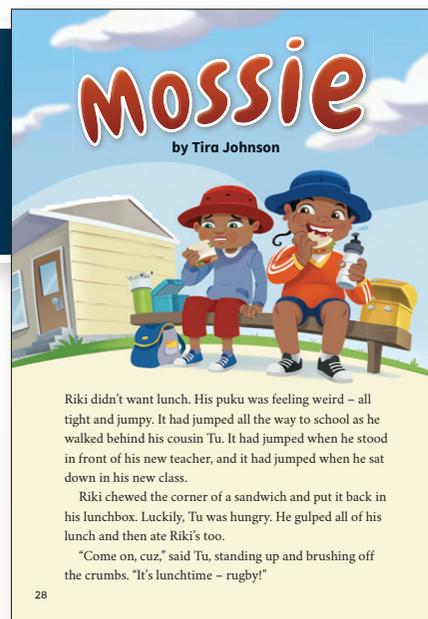
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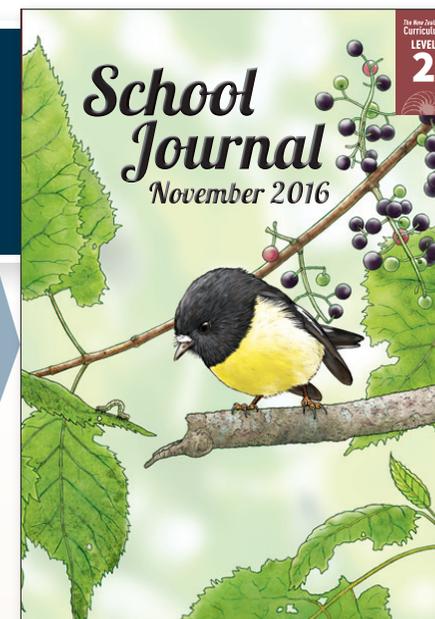


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