

Bouncing the Beat

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The refresh of *The New Zealand Curriculum* is replacing the Learning Progression Frameworks and Literacy Learning Progressions by incorporating the learning for literacy and communication into the curriculum learning area progressions. To learn more about the refresh, visit [Refreshing The New Zealand Curriculum](https://www.education.govt.nz/refreshing-the-new-zealand-curriculum/).

Overview

This lively free-verse poem, ideal for shared reading, conveys the joy of performing the sāsā dance. It invites ākonga, in particular ākonga of Samoan heritage, to make connections to their cultural identity and their feelings about dance and other forms of performance.

A PDF of this article and an audio version as an MP3 file are available at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

For information about related texts, see the introductory TSM “Exploring Movement”.

Learning Progression Frameworks

- Making sense of text: using a processing system
- Making sense of text: using knowledge of text structure and features
- Reading for literary experience

Curriculum links

- English
- The arts
- Social sciences



The New Zealand Curriculum

Key text features

“Bouncing the Beat” includes the following characteristics that help ākonga develop the reading behaviours expected in year 3 and build their awareness of the features of poetry.

The structure of the text as a poem, divided into stanzas of various lengths

A variety of sentence structures (some very short, some spread over several lines) and a repeated refrain in italics

The narration in the first person plural (“We”)

The changing rhythm (beat) of the poem, reflecting the beat of the dance

A mix of explicit and implicit content within text and illustrations that requires ākonga to visualise what is happening

Some vocabulary that may be unfamiliar (for example, “slit drum”, “double beats”, “Tulolo”, “Nofo”, “splayed”, “Sauni”, “cupped hands”, “canoes”, “tilt”, “ava”, “wringing out”, “fau”, “sāsā”, “cross-legged”, “fibre”, “pigeon”), the meaning of which is supported by the context, the sentence structure, illustrations, and a glossary

BOUNCING THE BEAT

The wooden slit drum talks in double beats.
Rat-a-tat
Rat-a-tat
We're counting the beats.
Fetu shouts, "Tulolo!"
Heads bow.
We bend forwards, fingers press the floor.
Fetu shouts, "Nofo!"
We sit up straight, hands on knees, fingers splayed like starfish.
Fetu shouts, "Sauni!"
We're ready.
Rat-a-tat
Rat-a-tat
Knees bounce the beat, flat hands clap, cupped hands clap.

We're paddling canoes. Heads tilt up, down. Shoulders roll forwards, back.
Rat-a-tat
Rat-a-tat
Knees bounce the beat.
We're weeding gardens, flying like manumea.
Rat-a-tat
Rat-a-tat
Knees bounce the beat.
We're mixing 'ava, wringing out the fau, flick, slap, clap, tap, bend and turn.
We're dancing the sāsā, cross-legged on the floor.
Rat-a-tat
Rat-a-tat
Bouncing the beat.

*ava: a drink made from the root of the 'ava plant
fau: fibre from the bark of the fau tree that is used as rope
manumea: a large pigeon, the national bird of Samoa
sāsā: a group dance from Samoa

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Serie Barford
Illustration by Phillip Poce

Language features typical of poetry:

- onomatopoeia (“rat-a-tat”, “clap”, “flick”, “slap”, “tap”)
- personification (“the slit drum talks”)
- similes (“fingers splayed like starfish”, “flying like manumea”)
- repetition

Possible reading purposes

What can ākongā expect to find out or think about as a result of reading this text?

- To enjoy this description of a sāsā dance
- To build a picture of the children “bouncing the beat”
- To think about the author’s purpose.

Possible learning goals

What opportunities does this text provide for ākongā to learn more about how to decode, make meaning, and think critically about texts?

This text provides opportunities for ākongā, over several shared readings, to:

- draw on phonics knowledge to **decode** words and use other sources of information such as context, sentence structure, and knowledge of morphology to check for meaning
- **make connections** between the information in the text and illustrations and their prior knowledge and experiences to **visualise** what the author is describing
- share their opinions about the impact of the poem (**evaluate**)
- notice the mix of English and Samoan language in the poem and **make connections** to their feelings about the language (or languages) they speak
- **make inferences** about the **author’s purpose**.

If you are using the [ELLP Pathway](#) for monitoring and tracking the progress and achievement of English language learners, your planning and learning goals from Pathway Stage 3 could include:

- identify and discuss cultural values underlying texts
- attend to the prosody (rhythmic pattern) of text and read accordingly, for example, rhythm, modulation, pronunciation, pausing.

Introducing and reading the poem

- Before introducing the poem, use the audio version to familiarise yourself with any vocabulary that is new to you.
- Use your knowledge of your ākongā to ensure that your introduction to the text is effective in activating and drawing on their prior knowledge. This TSM suggests using a shared reading approach, which will be especially supportive for English language learners.
- Use the title and illustration to start a discussion about what “bouncing the beat” might mean. Encourage ākongā to share their expertise. Clarify that this poem is about the sāsā. You could play them the audio recording of the drums to reinforce the idea of the beat.
- Explain that the poem includes Gagana Sāmoa (Samoan language), some of which is explained in the glossary. Tell ākongā that you are going to read the poem together and will practise pronunciation and discuss word meanings in more detail after the reading. This is a good opportunity to use the expertise of any ākongā in the class who have knowledge of Gagana Sāmoa. Ask if anyone speaks Samoan or has family members who do. Encourage them to lead the learning (if they are happy to do so) by reading the Samoan words aloud, discussing their meanings, and then practising correct pronunciation with you and the other ākongā.
- Share the initial purpose for reading, then share-read the poem, encouraging ākongā to join in as they feel confident.
- Invite ākongā to share their responses. If necessary, remind them that not all poems rhyme or follow a regular pattern. Prompt them to notice that the rhythm (or beat) of the poem is like the beat of the dance. Encourage ākongā to make connections to their own experiences of cultural performances.
- Reread the poem together, discussing and clarifying the meaning of new vocabulary if ākongā are unsure. They could work in pairs to practise pronouncing the Samoan words.
- Support ākongā to think critically: *Who is telling us about the dance?* Prompt them to notice the use of “we”, which suggests the poem is being told from the point of view of one of the children performing the sāsā.
- Remind ākongā of the initial reading purpose and, together, reread the poem, stopping often to discuss (and possibly act out) what’s happening in each stanza. Draw on the cultural expertise of ākongā in the group. Discuss what happens at the end of a sāsā dance (because this poem finishes while the sāsā is still in progress). If sāsā is new to your ākongā, you could show them a video, such as this one by [Tamaki Intermediate](#).

Thinking, talking, rereading

You can revisit this poem often, providing opportunities for ākongā to build comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions.

- Encourage ākongā to perform the poem together, perhaps with different groups reading each stanza. Prompt them to notice some of the techniques the author has used to create impact in the poem, for example:
 - the repeated “*Rat-a-tat*” refrain (always in pairs because the drum “talks in double beats”)
 - the command and response structure of stanzas 2–4
 - the very short lines in some stanzas that help to draw attention to each action that is being described
 - the summary of the poem in the final stanza, returning to the idea of the “beat”.
- Explore in more detail the cultural activities and artefacts described in stanzas 6, 7, and 8 (paddling canoes, weeding gardens, flying like manumea, mixing ‘ava, and wringing out the fau). Draw on the knowledge of ākongā in the group, people in the community, and other information sources, such as the school library and the internet.
- Prompt ākongā to think critically about the author’s purpose: *How does this poem make you feel? What does the author want you to notice and think about?* Clarify that Serie Barford is of Samoan heritage. Draw out the idea that as well as conveying a lot of information about the sāsā and aspects of Samoan life, the poem also celebrates the joy of being part of a performance and using Samoan language.
- Encourage ākongā to make connections to their own feelings when they perform in group activities, particularly cultural events. They could draw on their own experiences to discuss the criteria for becoming the caller or the leader of a dance group and why Fetu was chosen.
- Ākongā could compare the features of the sāsā, including the movements, with those of other cultural dances that ākongā may be familiar with, including kapa haka. Some ākongā may know about use of the pahū (drum) in te ao Māori.
- Identify the sound words (onomatopoeia) and enjoy recreating them using voices and body parts.
- Use this poem as a model for shared writing about an activity that is significant to your group, class, or community.
- Read and enjoy other free-verse poems and other descriptive poems (see Related Texts in the introductory TSM “Exploring Movement”).

Building language knowledge

As ākongā reread and discuss the poem, note opportunities for explicit instruction and to explore language features in more detail. You could:

- practise pronunciation of the vowel sounds of Gagana Sāmoa
- explore the meanings of less familiar verbs such as “splayed” and “cupped”
- remind ākongā of strategies they can use to work out word meanings: using the illustrations, the context of the phrase and surrounding text, making connections to their prior knowledge, and referring to the glossary.

For English language learners, [SELLIPS](#) and the [teaching strategies section of ESOL Online](#) also have ideas for purposeful and relevant tasks.