

The White Truck

based on a true story by Lani Wendt Young

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Year 7



Overview

Based on a true story, "The White Truck" recounts the removal and isolation of a leprosy patient in Sāmoa. The story expertly engages the reader by providing clues without explicitly stating what the issue is. Students will connect with Timu and Moana and feel empathy as the events unfold. By analysing and synthesising the actions of the characters, students will gain an understanding of the conflicting viewpoints. The descriptive and figurative language may be challenging for some readers.

A text box at the end of the narrative provides information on leprosy and the policy to isolate and treat sufferers, enacted by the then New Zealand administration in Sāmoa. This was in direct contrast to the traditions of the people of Sāmoa. This text provides opportunities to understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities.

Text related by theme "Pōwhiri for a Prince" SJ 3.2.07

Text characteristics from the year 7 reading standard

words and phrases with multiple meanings that require students to know and use effective word-solving strategies to retain their focus on meaning

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

But now a stranger stood there outside, blinking against the glaring sunlight. The skin on one side of her face was thick and scarred so that you could hardly see her eye. Timu was so startled, he shrank back into his seat on the branch. The strange woman reached to pull her lavalava back over her head, revealing twisted hands.

Eager to be away from there, the men bundled Moana's mother onto the truck before they clambered up themselves. The truck started with a grumbling roar and slowly pulled away. Moana's father ran beside it, hanging on to the tray, speaking hurriedly to his wife as she sat there, slumped and impassive. The truck picked up speed as it began its journey to the wharf, to where the ship lay in wait for its human cargo. Mika stood and watched the truck - defeated - but Moana started running after it, the sun-baked tar burning the bare soles of her feet.

And then the truck turned out of sight.

Timu slipped from his perch in the tree and ran to stand beside his friend, awkward and unsure. He had never seen Moana cry. Before he could figure out what to say, Moana turned on them.

"Why didn't you stop them? Why did you let them take my mama?" She yelled at her father. Her brother. At her grandmother. The neighbours. And then she yelled at Timu.

From 1920, when the New Zealand government first began to administer Sāmoa, leprosy patients were isolated at the hospital in Apia before being taken for treatment to Makogai in Fiji. Although some returned on being cured, many patients died in Fiji. The European practice of isolating leprosy patients was a very different approach from that taken by the people of Sāmoa, who were accustomed to caring for their loved ones at home.

illustrations by Leilani Isara

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

sentences that vary in length, including long, complex sentences that contain a lot of information

academic and content-specific vocabulary

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 7

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social studies)

LEVEL 4 – Understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes

- To gain an understanding of how people in the past, and in different places, dealt with a devastating disease
- To identify the author's purpose for writing
- To examine the practice of isolating leprosy patients
- To consider the impact of historical health practices on communities.

Possible writing purposes

- To explore the author's use of detailed descriptive language to engage the reader
- To describe the impact of historical health practices on communities
- To record questions for an inquiry prompted by the text.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar and/or specialist words and phrases, including “pitch tar”, “mangoes”, “nimble”, “cluster”, “yanking”, “banana patch”, “harbour”, “hulking”, “wharf”, “jostled”, “eh”, “ventured”, “shrouded”, “pricklings”, “slivers”, “wearily”, “protective barrier”, “transfixed”, “intensified”, “dawned on”, “bewilderment”, “pestered”, “human cargo”, “defeated”, “administration”, “leprosy”, “isolated”, “treatment”, “accustomed”, “practice”
- Gagana Sāmoa and names, including “Oka”, “lāvalava”, “Pālagi”, “Auē”, “Siniva”, “Sāmoa”, “Apia”, “Makogai”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify new vocabulary that the students should prioritise for learning. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

Tell the students the story contains gagana Sāmoa (language of Sāmoa) that may be unfamiliar. Prompt the students to use contextual clues or prior knowledge of the language to understand the words they may not know.

Identify vocabulary your students will need support with in order to understand the story. Select ten to fifteen items. Give each pair of students two or three items and simple example sentences using each item. Ask the pairs to discuss the sentences and what they think their vocabulary items mean. Give pairs definitions for their items and have them match these up. Check they have done this correctly and tell them to prepare to explain their items to the rest of the group (using acting, pictures, example sentences, and so on). Ask the pairs to explain their items, and create a word bank by sticking their items and definitions onto a poster. Refer to the word bank during reading.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- The significance of extended family, and of cultural values to do with communal living, to the people of Sāmoa
- The fruit, crops, and landscape of Sāmoa
- The concept of living on a small island and the importance of ships to the people there
- Knowledge of leprosy
- Knowledge of colonisation and the politics and practices that can go with it.

Possible supporting strategies

Prompt discussion about the students' extended families – where they live and how they support each other. Explain to the students the importance of extended family to some cultures. Be sensitive to individual situations by emphasising that there is no “right” family structure and that within different cultures it can vary.

Provide pictures of Sāmoa to support discussion about the landscape and way of life on an island. Invite students who have experiences of the landscape and the culture of Sāmoa to share these and make links to the story.

Provide opportunities for students to share their knowledge but ensure they don't feel you are making assumptions about their experiences.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A narrative where the first sentence hints at an issue, with clues provided throughout the text
- Descriptive language, for example, “a hanging cluster of ripe fruit”
- Use of similes, metaphors, and connotative language
- The use of people's names without explaining who they are
- A text box at the end of the narrative that supports understanding of the text.

Possible supporting strategies

Remind the students of other narrative texts they have read and discuss the expectations they have as readers. Explain that this story gives readers clues about an issue throughout the text.

Support the students to visualise the scenes and the character's emotions by questioning, drawing pictures, and discussion. Make direct links to the words and phrases that convey this information.

Check with the students that they know who is being referred to. On a photocopy or whiteboard, highlight the characters' names and draw links to the clues (in some cases further along in the text) to make explicit who each person is.

For information about language for describing and recounting, and ideas on how to support students, see *Supporting English Language Learning in Primary Schools: A Guide for Teachers of Years 7 and 8*, pages 10–19 and 20–29 (in this resource, the text form narrative is included in the language function recounting). For information about ordering and a PDF of this booklet, go to <http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Reviewed-resources/Supporting-English-Language-Learning-in-Primary-School-SELLIPS>

Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “The White Truck”

It was a hot, sticky day when they came for her.

Moana’s grandmother looked after the family because Moana’s mother was always sick. She spent most of her days in bed. Timu thought she must have an illness ... made her sad.

They each put on a cloth mask to cover their mouth and nose ...

Students (what they might do)

Students **locate, evaluate, and synthesise** information about Moana’s mother from across the text. They go back to the first sentence in the story to conclude that it refers to Moana’s mother.

Students **infer** the gravity of her illness. They **make connections** to their prior knowledge to form a **hypothesis** about the illness.

Timu felt pricklings of unease as slivers of conversation knifed through the air.

Students **locate** the word “knifed” and identify that it is not being used in the usual way. They use their prior knowledge of the word and the context of the sentence to **infer** the nature of the conversation and to understand the imagery.

They jumped out, without smiles – and two of the men went inside Moana’s house. The others, carefully avoiding Grandmother’s eyes, ...

One of the men carefully but firmly pulled Moana away from her mother.

Eager to be away from there, the men bundled Moana’s mother onto the truck ...

Students **locate and synthesise** information from across the text to interpret the feelings of the six men. Students **evaluate** the men’s actions and draw conclusions about the author’s purposes.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

MODEL your thinking for the students.

- When I read the first sentence of this story, I wondered who the “her” was. Now that I have read about Moana’s mother and how sick she was, I am thinking that maybe it referred to her. I will keep that in mind as I continue to read.

PROMPT the students to form a hypothesis.

- The author has given us information about Moana’s mother. Look at the last sentence. What does that tell us about the illness?
- One of the clues we have is that she only came out at night. Why might that be?
- “Shrouded” means masked or covered. How does that word add to or change your ideas about the illness? What do you expect to find out from the text?

Use a graphic organiser like the example below to support the students to make hypotheses about who the “her” in the first sentence refers to and about what’s happening to Moana’s mother. Ask the students to create their own hypotheses at selected points in the story. Have them record their hypotheses in the first column, note evidence in the second, and add a question in the third. Have the students share their ideas with a partner. Ask pairs to share with the group. Students who have a first language other than English could make notes in this language.

hypothesis	evidence	question

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to interpret the descriptive language. Encourage them to articulate how Timu was feeling.

- What does “pricklings” remind you of? What was making Timu uneasy?
- Tell your partner what you think “slivers” are. Why was Timu hearing “slivers of conversation”?
- What do you know about the word “knifed”? How might a conversation knife through the air?
- What can we infer about what was being said? Which words give us clues?

PROMPT the students in order to support their understanding of the text’s theme. Ask them to locate information about the six men in the back of the truck.

- I wonder if the men were locals and were known to the family?
- How do you think the men were feeling about taking Moana’s mother away? What makes you say that?
- Why did they carefully avoid Grandmother’s eyes? What knowledge did these men have that the Pālagi doctor and nurse may not have had?
- Towards the end, they were “eager to be away”. Why do you think that was?
- Why do you think they took her away even though they knew how upsetting it was for the family and how different this approach was to the way things were done in Sāmoa?
- What do the actions of these men signal to the reader? I wonder what the author’s purpose was for writing this story?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your summary of the actions of the six men helped you to understand the conflict they felt. Sometimes slowing down and summarising can help to clarify characters’ actions or the impact of events.
- You are thinking critically about what you read and that helped you to find the underlying message that the author wants to share.
- Discussing the unfamiliar phrase with your partner really helped you to connect what you know about the word “knife” to work out what “knifed through the air” means.

METACOGNITION

- What image did you have in mind when the men formed a protective barrier? How did that help you know what was happening?
- How did the information the author provides in the text make you change or alter your predictions of what was going to happen?
- What strategies did you use to work out the names of the people in the text?

Reading standard: by the end of year 7

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

Text excerpts from “The White Truck”

Grandmother screamed again and sank to her knees. Her crying was like a pigeon caught in a trap, rising and falling, wings beating uselessly against the braided net.

EXTENDED SIMILE

An extended simile provides more detail to the comparison being made in the text. In this instance, it extends beyond the one comparison (with the crying).

Juice ran down his chin, sweet and messy.

ADJECTIVAL PHRASES

An adjectival phrase is a group of words without a verb that adds information about the noun. The phrase “sweet and messy” adds information about the juice.

Authors make decisions about where to place the phrase within the structure of a sentence.

Moana caught her breath and grabbed tightly onto Timu’s arm. The two friends were frozen, wide-eyed at the scene unfolding below them.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Describing the actions of characters in detail emphasises their responses to events. By adding detailed description, authors elaborate on the events in the text and provide insight into the characters.

METACOGNITION

- Your adjectival phrases really add to the images for the reader. What are your strategies for deciding which words you will use?
- Lots of thought goes into extending similes to ensure they make sense. What helped you to do this?

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to link to their prior knowledge of similes.

- We use similes in our writing to create an image in the reader’s mind by making a comparison. What are some you know? What do you notice about this simile?

EXPLAIN how a simile works. Write the abbreviated simile – “Her crying was like a pigeon caught in a trap”. Ask for student responses about the effect of the abbreviated and extended similes. What extra information do we get? Discuss how the extended simile gives us an understanding of the sound of her crying (“rising and falling”) and provides an insight into the helplessness the grandmother felt (“uselessly”).

- Have a look at your writing. Have you used any similes? How could you extend one of them to provide more detail for the reader?

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to consider how sentences can be structured differently.

- The author has chosen to add information about the juice. What is that information? This is an adjectival phrase as it tells us more about, or describes, the noun (“juice”).
- How has the phrase been included in the sentence?
- In what other ways could this sentence be written?

Write out the two other ways of expressing the sentence:

- *Sweet and messy juice ran down his chin.*
- *Juice, sweet and messy, ran down his chin.*
- What do you notice about the three different structures? What is the effect? Why do we use different sentence structures?

PROMPT the students to review their draft writing to identify sentences where they could add adjectival phrases. Students could gain peer feedback as to the effect of their phrases and sentence structures.

DIRECT the students to locate examples of actions taken by one of the characters in the text. In pairs, students discuss how the author provided detail about what happened. Provide questions to guide their talk.

- What has the author described?
- What language features were used?
- How has the author used adverbs or adjectives?
- What impact has the choice of vocabulary made?
- How has this given the reader a clear image of how the characters were feeling?

PROMPT the students to revisit their draft writing to identify places that need more detailed description. They can then recraft using some of the language features discussed with their partner.

For students who need extra support, practise using the features through co-construction, or else by adding two sentences together, and then have them attempt it with their own sentences (perhaps using a word bank if necessary).

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I see you have extended your simile about the water slide. The words you have chosen combine well to carry on the image of a snake.
- I notice you have varied the way you structured the beginning sentence. It makes the opening more interesting to read.
- Your detailed description of what you did after scoring the goal really helps the reader to understand how happy you were.