

Ngā Mahi a te Rēhia: Māori Games

by Ross Calman

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Overview

“In early Māori society, games were played by everyone ...” This report describes eight traditional Māori games and lists several more. The report is clearly organised, with an introduction then separate sections that provide information about different types of game and their purposes. The text is an excellent introduction to this aspect of Māori culture, and the author suggests Internet links for further information. The fictional story, “Eggshell”, which follows the article, gives a modern-day example of children learning about a traditional Māori game.

As well as introducing readers to the games, this text can be used to help students understand and compare different cultures by exploring the role of games in the past and in the present.

Texts related by theme

“Eggshell” SJ L3 April 2013 | “Playing Kī-o-Rahi” SJ 2.3.10 | “Porotaka” SJ 2.3.05

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

Ngā Mahi a te Rēhia
Māori Games
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In early Māori society, games were played by everyone – adults and children, men and women, boys and girls. For most children, there was no school. They learnt many things by spending time with their grandparents, uncles, and aunts; by imitating adults; and by playing games. The whole kāinga (village) would join in games played at social events, such as weddings, harvest festivals, Matariki celebrations ... and even tangihanga (funerals).

The marae was one of the main venues for these games, which included haman (wrestling) and nōteketeki (acrobatics). On long winter evenings and in wet weather, indoor activities such as walata and haka, whai (string patterns), and kōrero pūrākau (storytelling) were popular. They usually took place in large communal houses. Sometimes a kāinga had a dedicated whare tapere (house of entertainment).

As well as providing entertainment for players and spectators, these games taught tribal traditions, the importance of rituals, and respect for nature. They also developed skills that were useful in warfare. Many of these games are still popular today.

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social studies)

Level 3: Understand how cultural practices vary but reflect similar purposes.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To learn about the role of games in Māori culture
- To compare the role of games in Māori and other cultures.

Possible writing purposes

- To research and write about one or more games, including the origins and purposes of the games
- To use the features of the text as a model for writing about a topic
- To research and write instructions or make a video to teach others one of the games in 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 words and phrases, including “society”, “harvest festivals”, “venues”, “communal houses”, “dedicated”, “tribal traditions”, “rituals”, “launch”, “ducked and dived”, “bad omen”, “paper mulberry plant”, “mound”, “throw underarm”, “versions”, “reciting a chant”, “tempo”, “trench”, “haka moves”, “knucklebones”, “Tongue twisters”
- The use of te reo Māori, including names of games, activities, places, and events
- The saying “He whare wānanga te whai” (Whai is a university)
- The Internet references and links.

Possible supporting strategies

Spend time familiarising yourself with any Māori words or terms that are new to you. You could follow the links provided in the text to watch one or two of the games mentioned. Depending on the knowledge of your students, you may need to provide accurate support for pronunciation and meanings.

Use copies of the illustrations or videos to preview some of the concepts and vocabulary for this text and help students make connections with their prior knowledge. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

Have students look at a selection of the illustrations in pairs or small groups. Ask them to describe what they can see and what they think it is used for. Compare answers as a whole group, making notes and highlighting (or feeding in) key vocabulary. Establish that the illustrations show equipment for traditional Māori games.

Tell the students about a game you know and then ask questions that highlight the type of information you gave and how you structured your description. Ask students to prepare a brief overview of a game they know about – name, equipment, who plays it, the purpose of the game (not detailed instructions on how to play). Tell the students to interview two or three others to find out about their games. (See the 3-2-1 oral language strategy at ESOL Online – Oral language strategies.) In small groups, have the students describe and compare the games they’ve heard about. Lead a discussion of some of the similarities and differences between the games. After reading page 3, refer back to this discussion and the notes you have made. Compare the purposes given there to the purposes you have talked about.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Familiarity with a variety of games
- Knowledge of Māori culture and the way of life “in early Māori society”
- Knowledge of the text features of a report.

Possible supporting strategies

Review the students’ knowledge of cultural concepts covered in the article, such as life on the marae, or the use of patterns to reflect tribal stories. Support students to make connections with their prior knowledge of Māori culture and traditions, and with their experiences of different games.

You may wish to show the videos mentioned on page 9 as a way of introducing the topic. (The video quality is poor, but the content is excellent.)

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- A clear report structure that includes a generalised topic and specific examples, an introduction, headings, and a brief summary that lists other games
- The repeated comparisons between the past and the present, including the use of the phrase “In early Māori society”
- The connections made between the use of games for entertainment and for teaching traditions and skills, for example, skills needed in warfare
- The use of would + verb to describe past actions that were habitual or routine.

Possible supporting strategies

Ask the students to share what they know about reading and writing a factual report. List the features they suggest on a chart and review them during or after reading. Show the students the title and headings in the article. Ask them what these tell them about the structure. Establish that the first section gives an introduction to the topic and the rest of the article gives specific examples. Tell them that, in various forms, this general to specific pattern is a common structure for non-fiction texts.

If students need support with following the changes in tense, give them a graphic organiser with spaces for past, now, and always. Model reading a section of the text and adding the words and phrases that signal the time into the relevant sections. Ask the students to find examples of each and to write in the words or phrases the author uses to signal the time period. The examples will need to include phrases such as “In early Māori society” and “today”, as well as the relevant verb forms. Note that the present forms are used to describe and give definitions of the games or equipment (“A mōrere ... is a pole ...”). These descriptions are in the “always” section. When the author is emphasising what happens now, he also uses the present tense.

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Social studies, level 3: Understand how cultural practices vary but reflect similar purposes.)

English (Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Ngā Mahi a te Rēhia”

The marae was one of the main venues for these games, which included mamau (wrestling) and pōteketeke (acrobatics). On long winter evenings and in wet weather, indoor activities such as waiata and haka, whai (string patterns), and kōrero pūrākau (storytelling) were popular. They usually took place in large communal houses. Sometimes a kāinga had a dedicated whare tapere (house of entertainment).

Students (what they might do)

The students **make connections** between their own experiences of entertainment and those in the article. They **locate** information and **evaluate** the skills and learning that different games involve.

The students **make connections** between their experiences of places of entertainment, such as halls, gyms, and movie theatres, and a “dedicated whare tapere” to understand the purpose of such facilities.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to monitor their reading, drawing on and using their repertoire of reading strategies to adjust their reading and attend to important information. Use some or all of the following prompts to support students during, or after, reading the extract.

PROMPT the students to think about their own experiences as they read.

- If the setting is familiar to you, your own experiences will help your understanding. You might be thinking to yourself, “Yes, that’s what we do on the marae.”

If you’ve never had to entertain yourself without TV or digital games, you might be thinking, “Wow, how did they get by without these things? I’d hate it!” Your personal experiences are very different, so you’ll need to think widely to find comparisons. You might think, “That’s a bit like camping or having a power cut – we have to make our own fun.”

MAKE a chart with the columns headed Game and Skills/learning.

- What kinds of skill or learning do games involve?
- Do different games have similar purposes?

DIRECT the students to add to the chart as they read.

ASK QUESTIONS to elicit connections.

- Have you played or seen a game like this?
- What other names are there for this game?
- It’s a popular game all over the world. Why do you think that is?
- What other games do you know that require clever use of your fingers?
- How can these connections help you understand as you read?

MODEL how you combine reading strategies.

- As I read this extract, I first made a connection between the picture and a similar game I used to play, called cat’s cradle. Next I thought about the use of the word “pattern” and the connection with tribal stories. I know that patterns in a meeting house carry stories, and now I can see that there are connections here. I visualised taniko patterns, and I’m wondering about the way whai might reflect them.

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students integrate information.

- Who was the fighting between in the New Zealand Wars?
- What do you know about puppets and how they are operated?
- What do you know about the use of the haka in war?
- Why wouldn’t the warriors just perform a haka in person?

EXPLAIN to the students that they’re integrating this information to come to a new understanding.

- What do you think about Titokowaru’s use of a karetao?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed you asking yourself questions as you read and rereading when you weren’t sure of the meaning. Those are good strategies for helping you stay on track while you’re reading.
- Thank you for sharing your connections with us: some of the traditional ... games you described sound very similar to Māori games.

Whai

Whai is a game of making patterns with a loop of string held between the player’s hands. Each pattern reflects tribal stories. There are so many different patterns, and so many stories associated with each pattern, that it is often said, “He whare wānanga te whai” (Whai is a university).

The students **make connections** between the text and knowledge they have of playing this or similar games. They **integrate** information in this extract with their knowledge that there were no electronic games in the early days. They then **infer** that string games are popular because one person or more can play them and they require no special equipment.

Students recall what they know and have seen of patterns in Māori culture, for example, kōwhaiwhai and tāniko. They **integrate** their prior knowledge and the saying to **infer** that tribal stories are a rich source of knowledge for Māori.

During the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s, men led by Titokowaru built a giant karetao at Tauranga-ika Pā (about midway between Hāwera and Whanganui). It stood 5 metres tall. From the safety of a trench below, the defenders of the pā could make the arms of the karetao perform haka moves.

The students **make connections** between the text, their knowledge of puppets, and their knowledge of the haka and its uses. They **integrate** these pieces of information to understand the reason the karetao was used in this way: they **infer** that by using the karetao, the warriors could use a haka to scare the soldiers and at the same time remain inside the protection of the pā.

METACOGNITION

- How did bringing your own knowledge about this topic help you engage with the text?
- How did the structure of this text help you to understand it?
- How does knowing how to integrate information help you when writing factual recounts?

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Social studies, level 3: Understand how cultural practices vary but reflect similar purposes.)

English (Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.)

Text excerpts from “Ngā Mahi a te Rēhia”

In early Māori society, games were played by everyone – adults and children, men and women, boys and girls. For most children, there was no school.

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Manu tukutuku (kites)

In early Māori society, children sometimes flew kites for fun, but generally kite-flying was a serious business.

Manu kāhu were capable of carrying a person. One story tells how Nukupewapewa, a Wairarapa chief, used a kite to lower a man into an enemy pā at night. The man opened a gate and let the attackers in.

During Matariki, kites were flown in memory of people who had died.

Nowadays, many people enjoy making traditional kites.

Examples of text characteristics

INTRODUCTION

In a report, the topic is usually stated at the beginning in a general way, and then developed through the report with specific details and examples. This sets the reader up to know what to expect and to activate their prior knowledge of the topic.

COHERENCE AND COHESION

Coherence (presenting information in a clear, logical order) and cohesion (the way the writer makes links between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs to create a text that “flows” for the reader) help make a report easy and interesting to read.

Cohesive devices (“One story tells how ...”) link paragraphs and make the move from general to specific clear.

USING EXAMPLES

Examples take a general idea (such as using kites for serious business) and show what it might be like in practice (the kite carried a man into an enemy pā). Examples help readers to visualise and understand important facts or ideas.

CHANGES IN TIME AND TENSE

In writing about the past and the present, writers need to take care to use the correct tense.

Words like “Nowadays” help readers to understand the change from information about the past to the present day.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to support students as they form their writing intentions.

- What is your purpose for writing?
- What will your audience already know about the topic? What will they want to know?
- How will you structure your writing? What structure will best suit your topic, purpose, and audience?
- What writing processes will help you to achieve your writing goals?

EXPLAIN the purpose of an introduction in a report.

- What kind of information will help orient your readers to the topic?
- How can your introduction engage your readers and make them want to keep reading?

You could use a table to model recording information about games and as a writing frame for students who need support with writing. Display the table with the notes for your game as you tell them about it. Model or co-write a description of your game (including an introduction and details). Analyse the structure of your writing, making notes on each section. Use the notes as a writing frame for the students. (See the DVD *Making Language and Learning Work 3*, Year 5 and 6 Social Studies Focus for an example of a teacher using a similar process.)

EXPLAIN these aspects of text organisation.

- *Coherence* refers to the way the writing is organised. Did you notice that in this article, the sections tell about different games and have headings? How have you organised the information in your writing? Will this help the readers’ understanding?
- *Cohesion* refers to the way the writer makes links between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs to create a text that “flows” for the reader. Did you notice the way the writer repeated the phrase, “In early Māori society” in this article? It helps readers to know that he’s talking about the past.
- Sentence structures, such as “One story tells how ...” alert the reader that an example is coming and help make the writing easy to understand because it signals the relationship between the ideas (statement and example).

TELL the students to work with a partner to check for the coherence of the information and the cohesion of their writing style as they edit and revise.

PROMPT students to add specific examples to help readers understand a piece of information or an idea. Remind them that the examples will also add interest to their writing.

SUPPORT any students who need help to clarify the time frames and tenses they are using.

- When did this happen? If it happened in the past, how can you change the verbs to make that clear?
- What words will help your readers to identify the changes in time throughout your article?

Ask the students to find examples of past tense in the text, brainstorm a few more, then co-construct sentences about the games they’ve talked about.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Using a written plan has helped you organise your writing. Now you’ve got a good plan, how are you going to flesh it out?
- I can see that revising has made your writing flow better – the sections follow in a logical order and the headings make each section clear to me.

METACOGNITION

- What structure have you used to organise your information? How did reading this article help you?
- What was challenging about organising your information? What helped you?
- How did your own experiences help you to write about this topic? What examples or details could you use to help your audience better understand your experiences?

 Writing standard: by the end of year 6

 The Literacy Learning Progressions