

Māui and the Sun

retold by June Melser
pictures by Cliff Whiting

Overview

This is a retelling of the legend of Māui's successful campaign to slow the sun. Lively dialogue helps to develop characterisation and encourages expressive reading. There is an audiotape of this text.

Suggested purposes

This text is a useful model of paragraphing and supports the comprehension strategies of identifying main ideas, analysing and synthesising, and evaluating.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the strong narrative structure
- the clear paragraphing
- the dramatic style:
- the personification of the sun in the text and illustrations
- the characterisation of Māui
- the Māori words
- the stylised illustrations incorporating traditional Māori designs
- the “ness” suffix in “darkness”.
- the combination of past-tense narrative and present-tense dialogue
- the dramatic nature of the dialogue
- the lively verbs
- the use of repetition for effect
- the use of a long dash for effect on pages 2, 6, and 11

Possible challenges

- the pronunciation of “Ai-ee” (“I-ee”) and “Āue” (“Oh-weh”).

Introducing the text

Tell the children that you have a retelling of a Māori myth for them to read. Talk about how myths are traditional stories that try to explain why the world is as it is. Briefly talk about a myth the children are familiar with and/or review what the children might expect to find in a myth, for example, a setting in the distant past, supernatural or magical characters and events, a hero, and personification of aspects of the environment.

Find out what the children know about the myth of Māui and the sun. Draw out the idea that Māui is a strong and clever character who often manages to trick others.

During the reading

Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator.

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

Pages 2 and 3 – If necessary, model the pronunciation of the word “Āue”. *What’s the problem here?* Check that the children understand the idea that day and night are determined by the presence of the sun. *Why would short days be such a problem?*

Page 4 – *What is Māui’s idea? Do you think it could work?*

Page 5 – *Does the sun really come up out of a hole?*

Page 6 – Note the use of the dash for dramatic effect.

Page 8 – If necessary, model the pronunciation of “Ai-ee!” *What do you think this means?*

Page 9 – Check that the children understand the meaning of “beat” in this context. *Why does Māui beat the sun?* If the children have prior knowledge of Māui’s myths, you could refer to Māui’s magic jawbone.

Pages 10 and 11 – Check the children’s predictions from page 9. *Was this a good solution to the problem?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, observing their use of expression, especially for the sections of dialogue.

Recall the introductory discussion. *What features of a myth did you find in this text?*

Review the narrative structure of the text. Identify the problem, the characters’ response, and the resolution. Talk about how the final paragraph contrasts with the situation described on page 2.

Draw attention to the author’s use of paragraphs. Explain how each paragraph has a main idea. Ask the children to reread a page or two with more than one paragraph and to summarise the main ideas of each paragraph.

Focus on the author’s style. *What makes this story sound so dramatic and exciting?* You could focus on one or more of the following aspects.

- Talk about how the combination of narrative and dialogue helps the story come alive. You could relate it to the children’s experience of plays, where the scene is set and then the characters talk.
- Focus on pages 8 and 9. These pages include repetition for effect, lively verbs, exclamations and exclamation marks, and dramatic dialogue that includes imperative language and questions.
- Explore the dramatic nature of the dialogue. Talk about the use of exclamations, the expressive punctuation (exclamation marks and dashes), the use of short clear sentences, the use of repeated phrases, the imperative nature of Māui’s dialogue, the sun’s use of questions when he’s under attack, and the use of alternatives to “said”.

- Talk about the author’s use of personification. Ask the children to identify the ways the author makes the sun seem like a person (the pronoun “he”, the idea that the sun can see [page 5], and the sun’s ability to talk). Together, track the portrayal of the sun through the illustrations. Note the tail behind the sun and his cheeky sideways look on the cover and pages 2 to 3 to suggest his speed through the sky and his control over the light, the way he dominates the illustration on page 7 (highlighting the dramatic nature of the battle), the dismay on his face on page 9, his dull colours and defeated aspect on pages 10 and 11, and the balance of light and dark colours on page 11.

Use this text for readers’ theatre, encouraging the children to pay particular attention to how punctuation is used for effect.

Focus on characterisation. Draw out the idea that Māui’s character is portrayed through his dialogue and actions and through the responses of the other characters rather than through direct description. Note how it’s Māui who identifies the problem, comes up with the idea to solve it, uses imperative language, and persists although his brothers tell him it can’t be done.

Focus on the sentences that include the word “darkness” (pages 2 and 5). Talk about how the suffix “ness” can be added to an adjective to create a noun. Practise with some other examples, such as “neatness” or “cleverness”.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the story on audiotape.

Turn the text into a play and perform it for the rest of the class.

Have the children draw their own stylised illustrations of the sun, using the illustrations in the text as a model.

Read other versions of Māui and the Sun or other tales about Māui.

Study the art of Cliff Whiting. You could make links to his carving on the marae at Te Papa.

Create a group painting or mixed media art work about the story, incorporating Māori visual elements.

Discuss the implications of the sun moving too slowly. Consider the positive and negative aspects of the sun shining all the time.