



Bok Choy

by Paul Mason • illustrations by Ant Sang



School Journal Story Library is a targeted series that supplements other instructional series texts. It provides additional scaffolds and supports for teachers to use to accelerate students' literacy learning.

Bok Choy has been carefully levelled. While the contexts and concepts link to English, science, and social sciences at level 3 of the curriculum, the text has a reading year level of year 4.

Teacher support material (available at www.schooljournalstorylibrary.tki.org.nz) contains key information to help teachers to provide the additional support and scaffolding that some students may need to meet the specific reading, writing, and curriculum demands of *Bok Choy*.

Bok Choy

by Paul Mason
illustrations by Ant Sang

Otago, 1865

Jacob is helping his mother when Ah Sum calls by. Ah Sum hauls his sacks through the town, selling his vegetables door to door.



The old man bows his head and lowers his pole.

They look good.



I don't know how you can eat that muck.



Mrs Bishop talks as if Ah Sum isn't there. Her son, William, beats their carpet.

It's called bok choy, Mrs Bishop.



Thank you, Ah Sum.





William sneers at Ah Sum.

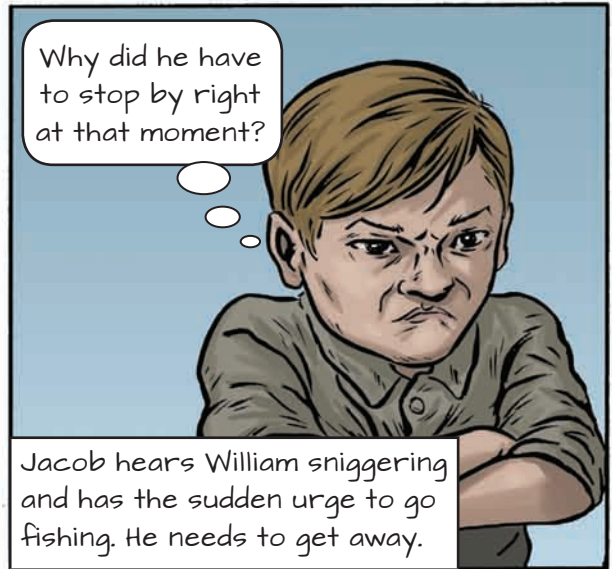


Chinaman!



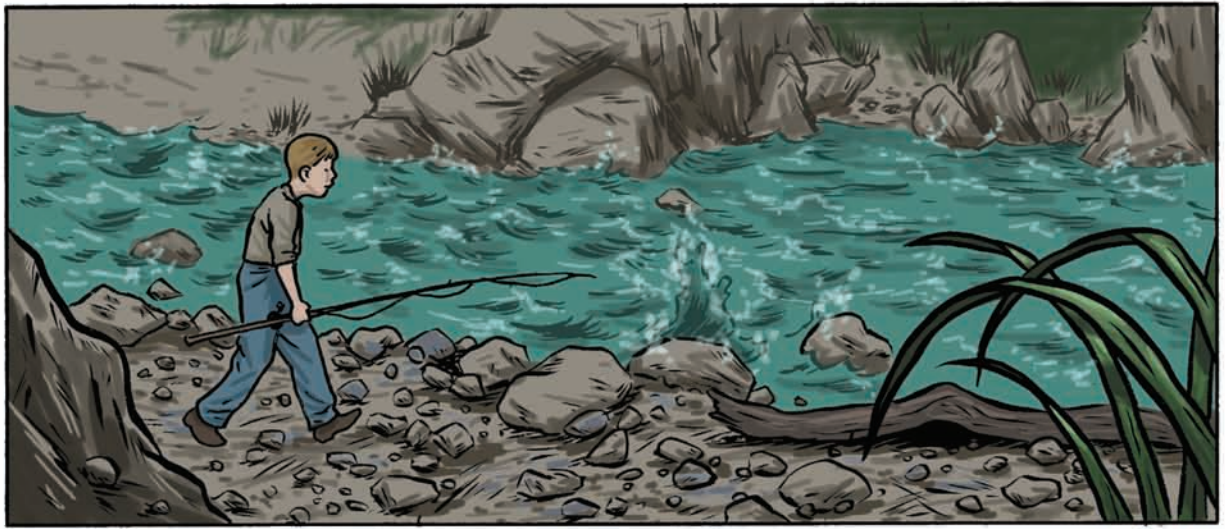
I don't like eating those Chinese cabbages either.

William just laughs and thumps the carpet. Jacob knows he'll get more of the same at school.



Why did he have to stop by right at that moment?

Jacob hears William sniggering and has the sudden urge to go fishing. He needs to get away.

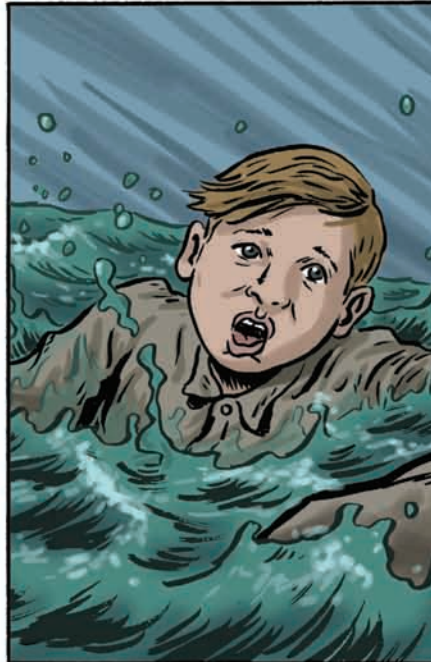


It only takes a moment for the river to steal Jacob.

A stumble as he casts out ...



... a worn-out boot on the slippery rock ...



... and he is up to his waist in the unkind water.

The current closes in on him, swirling and tugging. He is swiftly dragged into the middle, where turquoise turns to deep blue.

Jacob flails his arms.



He tries to stand.



Finally, he spins round on his back and faces downriver, the cold squeezing his lungs.



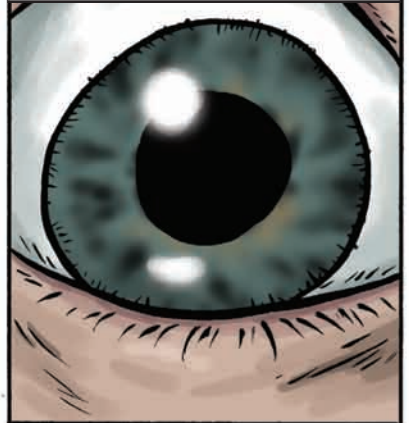
Dark shapes loom close. Rocks - if he can only get to them!



Jacob tries to swim.



But the rocks come too soon - he's got it wrong - and his body slams against a wall of stone.



Jacob wakes in a darkened hut.



In the gloom, he sees a man hunched over, tending a fire that is more smoke than flame. Jacob tries to sit up. He groans.



Jacob recognises him - Ah Sum.

Rest, rest.

My mother?

Ah Sum turns and presses him down, drawing the covers back up to his neck.



Mother come soon.

Ah Sum busies himself over the fire, then gives Jacob a mug of something hot to drink, supporting the boy's head with his hand.



Jacob takes little sips, and warmth floods his chest.



Walking home,
I see you in water,
on rocks. You
lucky boy.

I slipped.



Jacob notices that Ah Sum's
trousers are soaked through.



Thank you.



Jacob looks around ...



He has never been to the Chinese village before. "It isn't the sort of place you would want to visit," he can hear Mrs Bishop say. "Best they keep to themselves."





Ah Sum offers Jacob a dish with some rice, but Jacob shakes his head. Ah Sum begins to eat.

What is your name?



Jacob.
Jacob Smith.

Jacob Smith. Your mother come soon.
Ah Ling go to bring.



Jacob gazes at paintings near the bed.



Ah Sum notices Jacob's gaze.



Ancestors.



Family.

Jacob likes the tea. He is starting to feel better.



Where are they?
Your family.

Family in Canton. Wife,
children, everybody.



Jacob feels his stomach twist.



He was so angry
with Ah Sum earlier.

No come to
New Gold
Mountain.



Mother arrives,
ushered in by
Ah Ling. Ah Sum
struggles to his
feet to greet her.





Jacob!
Are you
all right?

Ah Sum
rescued me.



How can I
thank you?



Can you
walk?



Let's get you
home to bed.



Come by the house
tomorrow - let me
fix you up.

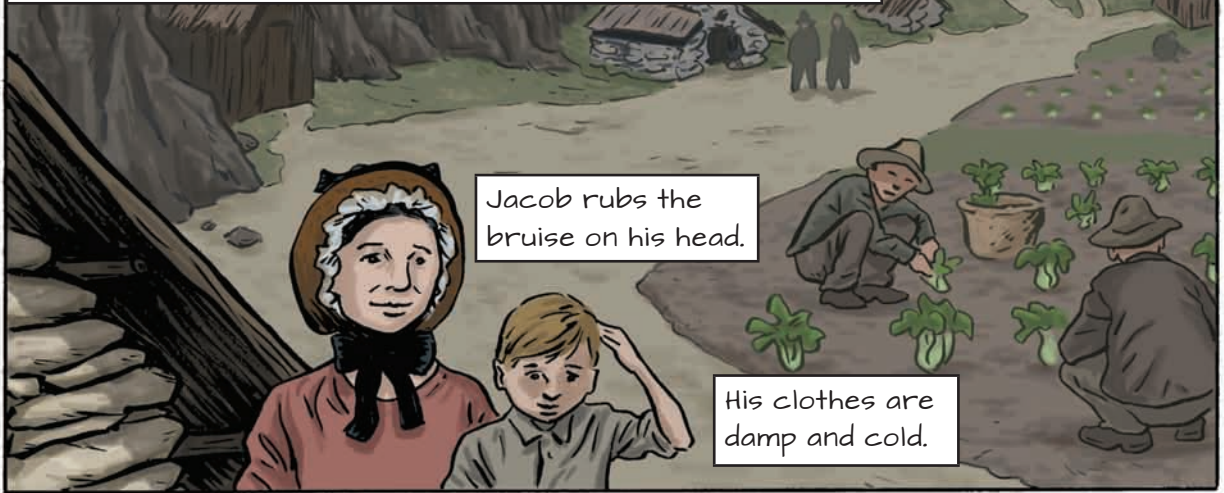
Ah Sum shakes his head.



No problem.
No money.

I insist.

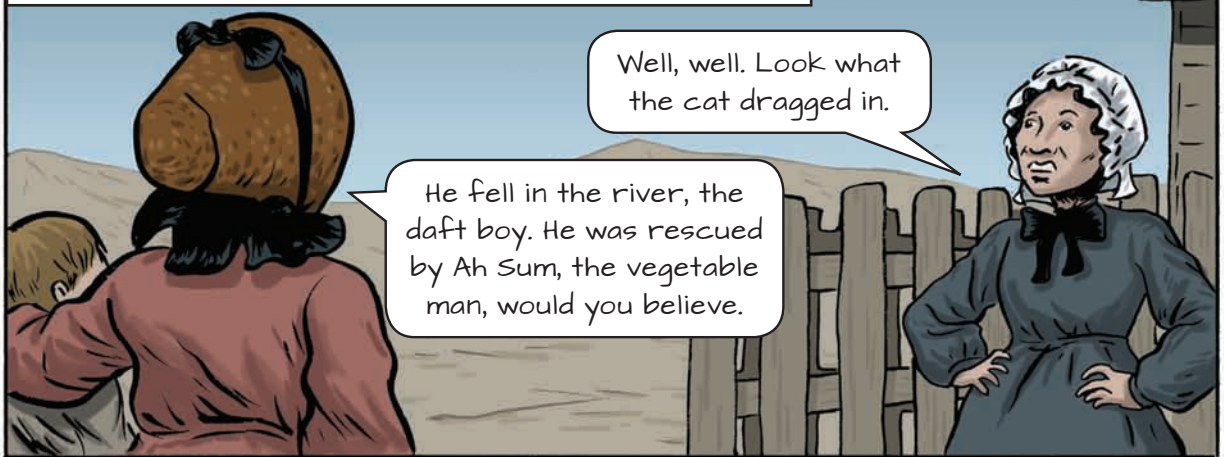
Jacob and his mother walk back through the Chinese village.



Jacob rubs the
bruise on his head.

His clothes are
damp and cold.

Outside their cottage, they are stopped by Mrs Bishop.



Well, well. Look what
the cat dragged in.

He fell in the river, the
daft boy. He was rescued
by Ah Sum, the vegetable
man, would you believe.



Was he indeed? Just you
wait. That Chinaman will
be after something.

Whatever do
you mean?



He'd probably sell his
own mother for a ha'penny,
given the chance.

Jacob thinks about the paintings in Ah Sum's hut.



He thinks about the offerings to the ancestors. The lonely, old man marooned in New Gold Mountain, a lifetime away from the family that he dreams of seeing again.

You've got that wrong, Mrs Bishop.

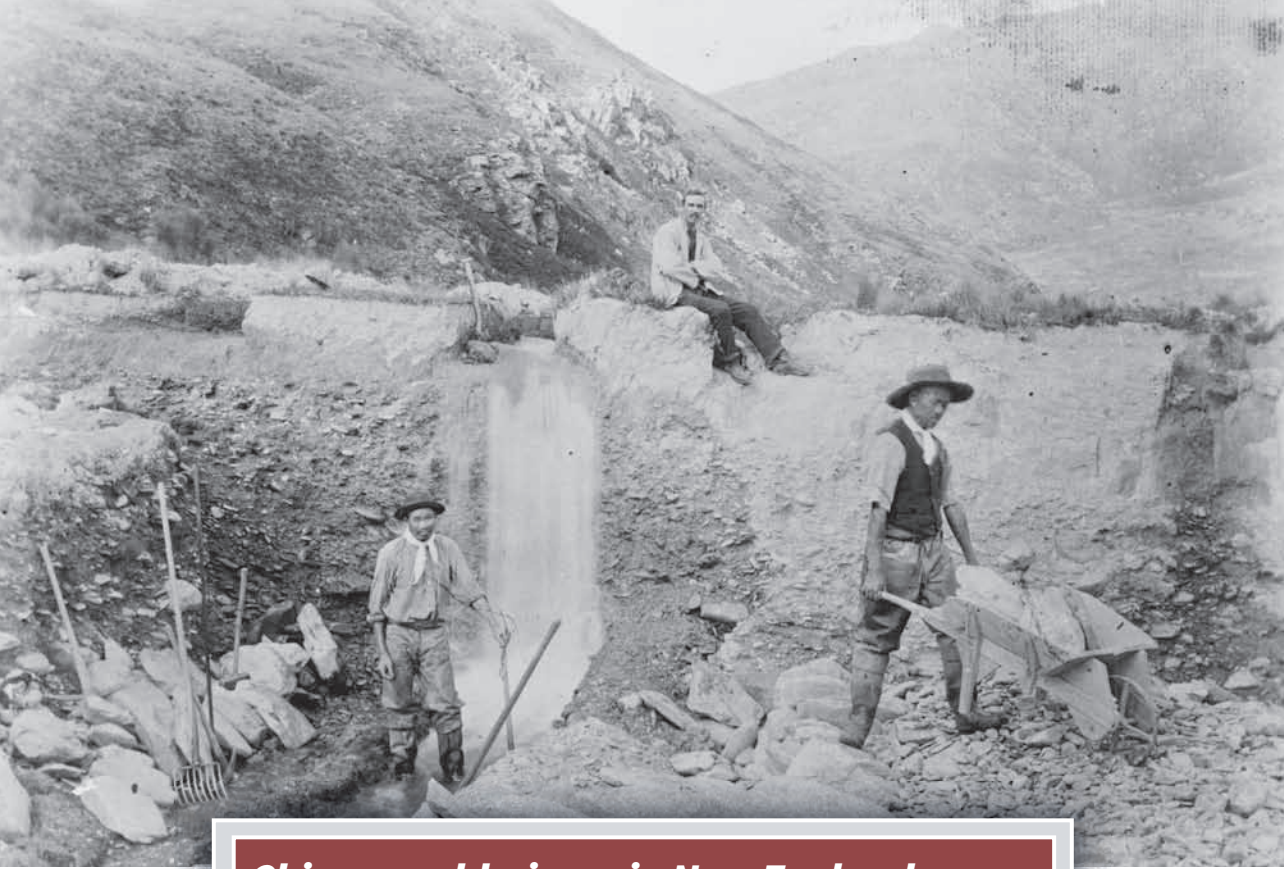


I hope you're not going to be cooking that foul cabbage again tonight.



It's called bok choy.





Chinese goldminers in New Zealand

In the 1860s, miners from China came to New Zealand to mine for gold. These miners hoped to make a fortune and then return home to their families. Although they were encouraged to come to New Zealand, not everyone was welcoming. The Chinese miners looked different and spoke their own language and usually ended up living in their own villages. As well as mining, some ran shops or sold goods from door to door.

While a few of the Chinese miners did strike it rich, most struggled to make a living. Some of them never saw their families again.

Acknowledgments

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