

Ship's Captain

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Year 6



Overview

This TSM contains information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The materials provide multiple opportunities for revisiting the text several times.

“Ship’s Captain” is the story of two boys learning how to live off the land and sea. Nan is a larger-than-life character, steeped in knowledge of bush lore and rongoā (Māori medicine). Pop is a gentle background force, who teaches the boys how to build a whare raupō. The lessons the writer learns go beyond bush lore; the story explores the value of knowledge that is passed down through generations, the pleasures of living simply, and the importance of being “the captain of your own ship”.

This article:

- is a first-person memoir in the past tense
- provides facts and information about bush lore and rongoā
- describes a way of life without digital technologies or electricity that will be unfamiliar to many children
- has a strong sense of place
- is a useful model for a character story or personal memoir.

A PDF of the text is available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme “Alvin and Me” SJ L3 May 2017 | “My Name Is Rez” SJ L3 November 2017

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

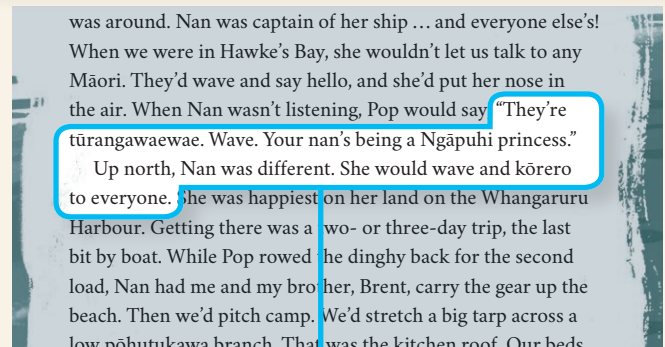
We have retained the links to the National Standards while a new assessment and reporting system is being developed. For more information on assessing and reporting in the post-National Standards era, see: <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-and-reporting-guide>



The bach was to be my home. I had the skills. Now that I was captain of my own ship, I was going to stay there as long as I could.

illustrations by Daron Par

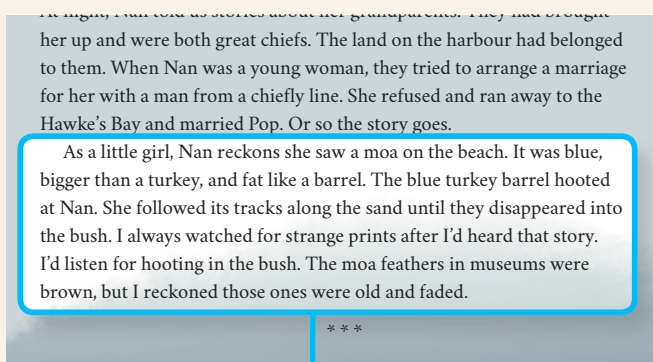
abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students’ understanding



was around. Nan was captain of her ship ... and everyone else’s! When we were in Hawke’s Bay, she wouldn’t let us talk to any Māori. They’d wave and say hello, and she’d put her nose in the air. When Nan wasn’t listening, Pop would say “They’re tūrangawaewae. Wave. Your nan’s being a Ngāpuhi princess.”

Up north, Nan was different. She would wave and kōrero to everyone. She was happiest on her land on the Whangaruru Harbour. Getting there was a two- or three-day trip, the last bit by boat. While Pop rowed the dinghy back for the second load, Nan had me and my brother, Brent, carry the gear up the beach. Then we’d pitch camp. We’d stretch a big tarp across a low nāhutikawa branch. That was the kitchen roof. Our beds

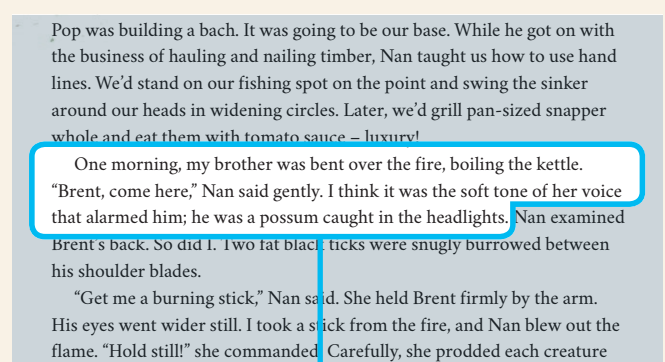
some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text



her up and were both great chiefs. The land on the harbour had belonged to them. When Nan was a young woman, they tried to arrange a marriage for her with a man from a chiefly line. She refused and ran away to the Hawke’s Bay and married Pop. Or so the story goes.

As a little girl, Nan reckons she saw a moa on the beach. It was blue, bigger than a turkey, and fat like a barrel. The blue turkey barrel hooted at Nan. She followed its tracks along the sand until they disappeared into the bush. I always watched for strange prints after I’d heard that story. I’d listen for hooting in the bush. The moa feathers in museums were brown, but I reckoned those ones were old and faded.

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



Pop was building a bach. It was going to be our base. While he got on with the business of hauling and nailing timber, Nan taught us how to use hand lines. We’d stand on our fishing spot on the point and swing the sinker around our heads in widening circles. Later, we’d grill pan-sized snapper whole and eat them with tomato sauce – luxury!

One morning, my brother was bent over the fire, boiling the kettle. “Brent, come here,” Nan said gently. I think it was the soft tone of her voice that alarmed him; he was a possum caught in the headlights. Nan examined Brent’s back. So did I. Two fat black ticks were snugly burrowed between his shoulder blades.

“Get me a burning stick,” Nan said. She held Brent firmly by the arm. His eyes went wider still. I took a stick from the fire, and Nan blew out the flame. “Hold still!” she commanded. Carefully, she prodded each creature

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps students to understand



Reading standard: by the end of year 6


VOCABULARY

Possible supporting strategies

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “dinghy”, “pitch (a tent)”, “tarp”, “scrub”, “plunge”, “swollen”, “poultice”, “bach”, “hauling”, “hand lines”, “sinker”, “ticks”, “burrowed”, “ember”, “currants”, “dimple”, “withered”, “sizzled”, “lashing”, “thatched”, “smoulder”, “chiefly line”, “moa”, “number eight wire”, “quiver”, “crusted”, “ancient”, “droppings”, “amid”
 - Te reo Māori: “tūrangawaewae”, “kōrero”, “tūpuna”, “hāngi”, “whare raupō”
 - Names of places and/or iwi: Hawke’s Bay, Ngāpuhi, Whangaruru Harbour
 - Kaimoana and flora: “pōhutukawa”, “mingimingi scrub”, “ponga”, “kawakawa”, “taro”, “sea lettuce”, “pipi”, “kina”, “mussels”, “oysters”, “cockles”, “mānuka”
 - A colloquial term: “mossies”
- Identify words or phrases that may be unfamiliar. Set students up for success by explaining that the story is about a young boy learning from his grandparents and that the story includes references to plants, kaimoana, and other elements in the environment that might not be familiar.
 - Discuss the concept of tūrangawaewae and the relationship Ngāpuhi have with the far north.
 - Brainstorm different kinds of kaimoana and words associated with camping and fishing.
 - Prompt students to use context clues to work out meanings of words, for example, by making predictions and reading on.
 - Encourage students to use the illustrations to work out the likely meaning of words, for example, the thatched roof of a whare raupō or the description of number eight wire.
 - Have the students sort unknown words into predicted categories, for example, insects, plants, kaimoana, animals, rongōa (medicine).
 - *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
 - See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

Possible supporting strategies

- Some understanding of camping in the outdoors
 - Some knowledge of kaimoana and native plants
 - Some understanding of being connected to the land
 - Some understanding of concepts such as tūrangawaewae, hāngi, and traditional knowledge
 - Some understanding of what water divination is
- Have students work in groups to brainstorm the knowledge that you would need if you wanted to live off the land, for example, what you could and couldn’t eat, how to create shelter, and ways to look after your physical health.
 -  The students could create their brainstorms on [Mindmup](#). They can then share them with other groups or project them for the whole class to see.
 - Find out what the students know about traditional sources of food and rongōa (Māori medicine).
 - Discuss the special relationship that Māori have with the land and the concept of tūrangawaewae, a place of special connection.
 - Explain what water divination is and that some people believe that you can find water underground using a branched stick or a similar device.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

Possible supporting strategies

- A memoir told in first-person narrative, past tense, with a strong storytelling feel
 - Some quite elaborate sentences, with asides that give the story a personal tone/voice
 - Some swift transitions from one point of focus to another, often within a single paragraph
 - The use of metaphors, including the extended, abstract metaphor of being the captain of your own ship
 - Some descriptions of process, for example, how to deal with ticks to prevent infection or how to build a whare raupō
 - The use of metaphor, dialogue, verb choice, and humour to build up a strong character profile
- Discuss what a memoir is and the emphasis memoirs place on personal experiences or knowledge. Discuss what challenges this can create for readers and the ways that writers can support their readers to understand what they are trying to communicate.
 - Before reading, discuss what features you would expect to see in a memoir about a summer holiday with grandparents.
 - Discuss the purpose of metaphors in creative writing.
 - Discuss ways that people jump from one idea to the next when they are telling a story orally. Look for examples in the text.
 - Discuss the clues the writer provides about what Nan is like as a person and the different techniques he uses to do this, for example, the way her actions are described and the prominence she has in the story.



Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

– Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

– Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible first reading purpose

- To enjoy a memoir about the writer's childhood
- To find out about a different kind of holiday – living off the land.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To explore how the writer has portrayed Nan to the reader
- To think about knowledge that gets passed down through generations and knowledge that gets lost
- To explore how a story can have several purposes
- To identify ways that language features such as metaphors and similes can create visual images
- To learn about ways of living simply off the land and sea.

Possible writing purposes

- To write about some important lessons you learnt from someone older
- To write a story about an experience in the bush or a holiday with friends or relatives
- To write a character study that reveals someone's personality in lots of different ways.



Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts: Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

First reading

- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Explain that this is a personal memoir about a boy’s relationship with his grandparents and the lessons they taught him about living off the land. Have the students discuss what they expect to read in the story.
- Discuss the kinds of knowledge that grandparents or great-grandparents might have that we don’t have today.
- Explain that the story has lots of information in it and encourage the students to read it slowly.
- Have the students read the first page and discuss in pairs what they have already learned about Nan and Pop from the first three paragraphs.
- Have the students read the rest of the story to themselves, noticing the lessons the writer learns from his grandparents.
- Some areas of the text require prior knowledge that the students are unlikely to have, for example, knowledge of water divining. Provide sticky notes for students to indicate words, phrases, or concepts that they don’t understand and want to come back to.

If the students require more scaffolding

- Explain that memoirs are based on personal knowledge and experiences and that it’s OK not to be able to make sense of every piece of information in a story.
- Encourage the students to focus on one aspect of the text, for example, the different lessons the boys receive from their grandparents or what Nan was like as a person.
- As they read, have the students complete the information matrix (below) to describe Nan’s character. You can change the headings to fit your reading purpose. The students can refer to this matrix when discussing the text in subsequent readings. After reading, they could use the information in their matrix to write a description of Nan without having to refer back to the story.
- Explain that the boys in the story are also learning lots of unfamiliar skills and information and that new learning often needs to be repeated several times before it makes sense or sinks in.

Description of Nan Matrix

Find words or phrases to complete the matrix. Add the page number for your evidence.

Find	1	2	3
3 interesting “saying verbs” that show how Nan spoke			
3 things Nan said that show what she was like			
3 examples of Nan’s traditional knowledge			
3 actions that show us what Nan was like			
3 phrases the author said about Nan that tell us more about her			

Subsequent readings How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose. Where possible, have the students work in pairs to discuss the questions and prompts in this section.

The teacher

Discuss the techniques the writer uses to show that Nan is a central character in the story.

- *How did other people relate to Nan, for example, Pop or the people who came to visit her? Why has the writer included these examples in his memoir?*
- *Find the words or examples that the writer uses to show Nan was in control.*
- *How did other people relate to Nan, for example, Pop or the people who came to visit her? Why has the writer included these examples in his memoir?*
- *Why does the writer include the story of the moa in the memoir?*

The teacher

Discuss the various lessons that the writer learns from his grandparents, from food-gathering skills, to whakapapa, to lessons about life.

- *What examples can you find of “learning by doing” rather than by being told?*
- *Find examples of where the writer uses metaphors to show something rather than tell the reader directly? How does this help the reader to engage with the story?*
- *Apart from skills related to food, shelter, and medicine, what are some other lessons the writer receives from his grandparents? How are these lessons passed on?*
- *How does reading a text more than once help you to identify the various purposes the writer had for writing the story?*

METACOGNITION

- *The writer has used a personal memoir to describe his grandmother. How might our understanding of her be different if he had written about her using a biography format and told her life story from a less personal perspective?*

The students:

- identify that Nan is introduced at the very start of the story and that she is referred to as the captain of everyone’s ship. They discuss what it means to be a captain, and that Nan must be pretty powerful if she could be the captain of everyone else’s ship as well as her own.
- identify the strong words used to describe Nan’s actions; “**plunge** your swollen foot” and “‘Hold still!’ she **commanded**.”
- identify the ways the writer shows that people respected Nan, for example, by calling on her help when someone was sick. These examples show that her knowledge and expertise was valued by the community. They show that she had mana and was important.
- discuss whether Nan was being dishonest about the moa or whether she made a mistake or just liked to tell a good story.

If they completed an information matrix, the students could refer back to it to help answer these questions.

The students:

- identify examples of learning by doing, such as setting up camp, using hand lines to catch fish, going into the bush to find kawakawa leaves to make medicine, and making a whare raupō.
- discuss the effect of using the metaphors “He was a possum caught in the headlights” and “two little currants with a dimple in their backs” and the visual images they create.
- discuss what the writer learns about his family history, for example, that his great-great-grandparents were great chiefs who owned the land on the harbour.
- with prompting, return to the idea of being the captain of your own ship and what the writer’s grandmother meant by it.
- think critically about the various kinds of information they take in each time they read a text, from facts and information to underlying themes and ideas.

The students:

- infer ideas and integrate information across the text to conclude that:
 - writing about experiences and people from the past is a way to keep hold of memories and to share something precious with other people
 - memoirs are personal, so they can often be moving or insightful
 - the writer might want other people to know how amazing his grandparents were or to share some of the things they taught him
 - an interesting title can make a story seem more inviting to readers and also gives clues about what the story is about or what the writer is trying to say
 - perhaps the writer chose “Ship’s Captain” because the most important lesson he learned from his nan was to be in control of his life.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You’ve been thinking critically about what the writer is trying to say in his memoir and identified the various ways he reveals who his grandmother is and why she is important to him.*



Reading standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics; Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Text excerpts from “Ship’s Captain”	Examples of text characteristics	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)
<p>Page 10</p> <p>Once we’d settled in, we stayed put. There was a shop, but it was a long walk around the oyster rocks at low tide. Those oyster shells were sharp, and if you cut yourself, Nan would have to dig out the shell with a needle. Any bits left would lead to infection. If that happened, Nan would plunge your swollen foot in hot water. “As hot as you can bear,” Nan would say (it was always hotter). Then you got a ponga poultice.</p>	<p>VOICE</p> <p><i>The writer’s voice (distinct personality, style, or point of view) is important in memoirs.</i></p> <p><i>Using asides draws the reader closer into the story and lets the writer’s personal voice come through.</i></p> <p><i>Moving from one idea to the next in a way that makes sense to the writer and to the story can create a sense of being told a story orally.</i></p>	<p>Explain that personal voice is important in memoirs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>When you write a memoir, you’re showing your reader how you saw or experienced a situation. Using an aside such as “it was always hotter!” let’s you speak directly to your readers so that they know how you saw things.</i>• <i>When people tell a story orally, they often move from one idea to the next quite quickly, but they know where they are heading and they take their listeners with them. In this story, everything comes back to the lessons the writer is learning from his Nan and what she was like as a person.</i>• <i>When you write a memoir, it’s important to identify a clear purpose for your story and to build up ideas related to it throughout your writing.</i>• <i>What other techniques can you use to give your writing a unique voice?</i>
<p>Page 13</p> <p>The ticks couldn’t walk. They were swollen with blood and too big. Instead, they rolled round in Brent’s hand, two little black currants, each with a dimple in its back. We watched them in the coals. They wriggled their tiny legs. Swell, sizzle ... pop.</p>	<p>METAPHORS</p> <p><i>Writers use metaphors to create images to help the reader visualise the object, action, or event that the writer is describing.</i></p>	<p>Clarify what metaphors are and the effects they create.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>How has the writer created a sense of fascination in this small scene? How effective is he in keeping your attention? Do you think the writer had seen ticks before this? Why or why not?</i>• <i>How does the metaphor help us visualise what the ticks looked like?</i>• <i>How can using metaphors give writing a personal feel?</i>• <i>How effective is the metaphor of the ship’s captain, referred to in the title and at the beginning and end of the story?</i>• <i>Read over your writing – is there a place where a metaphor would help the reader visualise the scene more clearly?</i>
<p>Page 12</p> <p>I took a stick from the fire, and Nan blew out the flame. “Hold still!” she commanded. Carefully, she prodded each creature with the stick’s red-hot end.</p> <p>“Still!” Nan repeated. She plucked the ticks from his back with a satisfied grunt. “There,” she said, passing the gruesome pair to Brent. “Now in the fire so they won’t lay eggs.”</p>	<p>DIRECT SPEECH</p> <p><i>What people say, and how they say it, helps to create a sense of someone’s character and personality.</i></p> <p><i>Using direct speech can create a sense of drama or storytelling.</i></p>	<p>Using direct speech in personal writing can bring different characters to life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Who does most of the speaking in the story? Why is this?</i>• <i>How does the writer describe the way Nan communicates? What does this tell us about her personality and power?</i>• <i>What can we learn about Pop from what he says and how he says it?</i> <p>Have the students include some direct speech in their own writing. When they have finished, they could swap their writing with a partner and critique its effectiveness in conveying a sense of what their character is like.</p> <p> The students could use Google Docs to write, share, and comment on each other’s writing.</p> <p>Support English language learners to notice the change in tense when writing direct speech. You could use a Verb Story activity to do this. Select a portion of the story that includes some direct speech. Write all the verbs in that portion of text on the whiteboard (in the same order as they appear in the text). Read the selected text aloud twice while the students actively listen. The students then retell the story orally, using the verbs as prompts. They could do this individually, with a partner, or as a class. The students could also write a version of the story based on the verbs listed.</p> <p>Build class lists of interesting “saying verbs” to use when writing, instead of using “said”.</p>

Text excerpts from “Ship’s Captain”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 10

Up north, Nan was different. She would wave and kōrero to everyone. She was happiest on her land on the Whangaruru Harbour.

SETTING

The setting of a story – its location and time – is an important component of storytelling.

The setting of a story can be as important as the characters. It gives the reader a sense of time and place. Setting can also help us to understand the characters in the story because people respond differently in different environments. Placing a character in an environment they feel confident in provides opportunities to show a person in their best light.

- Discuss why the setting is important in this story in terms of how we get to know Nan and what the writer is trying to say.
- How might the story have been different if it had been set in Hawke’s Bay or in a city?
- Why does the writer return to the bach at the end of the story? What does this tell us?

Have the students share their stories and give each other feedback on how well the settings gives a sense of time and place.

METACOGNITION

- What process did you use to decide which aspects of your memory you wanted to share? Why were these important to you?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve written a moving story about your grandmother and what she taught you when you broke her favourite cup. By using this example, you showed me how important her home was to her and how you liked to visit her.



Writing standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions