

Johnny Pohe and the Great Escape

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Year 8



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 material provides many opportunities for revisiting the text.

Porokoru Patapu (Johnny) Pohe was a daring and gifted pilot who flew bomber aircraft in the Second World War. In 1943, after twenty-two successful missions, his aircraft was shot down and he was captured. Johnny was taken to Stalag Luft III, a prison camp deep in Nazi Germany. This article tells the story of an ambitious prison escape that ended tragically for Johnny and for many others. It includes information about Māori involvement in the Second World War and about the devastating impact of bombing civilians in Germany.

This story:

- is a biography of an intrepid Second World War pilot who was the first Māori to be trained by the RNZAF
- provides a gripping story of a daring escape that didn't go to plan
- makes reference to race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1940s
- touches on the injustice of war crimes and the devastating impact war can have on soldiers and civilians.

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

Texts related by theme

“Fly” SJ L4 May 2019 | “Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū: The Pioneer Māori Battalion” SJ L3 June 2014 |
“Lest We Forget” SJ L4 June 2014 | “King and Country” SJ L4 June 2014 | “The Desert Kaupoi” SJSL L4 2014

Text characteristics from the year 8 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>

As a teenager, Johnny went to Te Aute College, a Māori boarding school in Hawke's Bay known for producing leaders. The school's motto is “Whakatangata kia kaha” (Quit ye like men, be strong).

Many of Johnny's classmates would also serve in the war.

Johnny was twenty-four and working on his family's farm when the Second World War started in September 1939. A few days later, he applied to train as a pilot. This was an unusual move.

Māori were expected to go into the army, just like they had in the First World War. They weren't encouraged to join the air force or navy.

Johnny was about to challenge this.



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

No Return

Back in Turangaarere, Johnny's family learnt the terrible truth. Their son and brother was not just missing – he was never coming home. The New Zealand government was “deeply shocked”, and in England, politicians said the executions were a war crime.

They resolved to bring the culprits to justice. By the time the hunt for those responsible had begun, Hitler and most of his highest-ranking officers were dead, although some of those involved were eventually tried and executed.

After the war, Johnny's ashes were moved to a cemetery in Poznan, Poland. He now lies a long way from home, alongside other men who escaped from the camp.

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

MĀORI AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Māori Battalion in Italy during the Second World War

The New Zealand government didn't make it compulsory for Māori to fight in the Second World War, but some Māori leaders, especially the politician Āpirana Ngata, encouraged their people to volunteer. Ngata saw the war as an opportunity. He believed that if Māori made a significant contribution, they would gain greater respect from Pākehā and be treated more fairly – ultimately as equals. For many young Māori, there was another motivation: adventure. They wanted to be a part of the great event that was consuming the world.

To encourage Māori to sign up – and to ensure their contribution would be visible – Ngata made sure that a separate unit was established in the army, the 28th (Māori) Battalion. Most Māori who fought during the war served within this unit – around

complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments



MĀORI AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The New Zealand government didn't make it compulsory for Māori to fight in the Second World War, but some Māori leaders, especially the politician Āpirana Ngata, encouraged their people to volunteer. Ngata saw the war as an opportunity. He believed that if Māori made a significant contribution, they would gain greater respect from Pākehā and be treated more fairly – ultimately as equals. For many young Māori, there was another motivation: adventure. They wanted to be a part of the great event that was consuming the world.

First Māori Pilot

Johnny Pohe became a qualified pilot in January 1941. He was the first Māori to be trained by the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). He left for England soon after and was posted to 51 Squadron, a Royal Air Force (RAF) unit based near the town of South. This squadron had bomber aircraft, and in mid-July, Johnny flew his first mission, bombing enemy targets in Europe.

Being part of a bomber crew was dangerous and stressful. Planes were targeted by guns on the ground as well as attacked by enemy aircraft. At night, searchlights swept the sky. The casualty rate for airmen like Johnny was high. Almost half (44 percent) of all crew who flew in RAF bombers were killed. Many more were wounded or captured and became prisoners of war.

By April 1942, Johnny had completed twenty-two missions. This was a lot – so many, in fact, that he was no longer expected to fly. For a time, Johnny worked as a flight instructor, but he was restless to return to the action. Eventually, he was allowed to rejoin his old unit. In September the following year, Johnny left on the mission that would be his last.



illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text's content.

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “missions”, “ambitious”, “tragically”, “descent”, “compulsory”, “significant contribution”, “ultimately”, “consuming”, “consequences”, “morale”, “devastation”, “engulfed”, “civilians”, “dinghy”, “inhumane”, “supplement”, “rations”, “monotonous”, “mass”, “perimeter”, “detect”, “escapee”, “daunting”, “dynamited”, “abandoned”, “pouches”, “resourceful”, “bribed”, “identity papers”, “renowned”, “tireless”, “ballot”, “forged”, “emerged”, “hitch”, “revealed”, “delayed”, “frostbite”, “fate”, “executed”, “cremated”, “culprits”
- Words associated with war, particularly the Second World War, including “Stalag Luft III”, “Nazi Germany”, “sign up”, “the 28th (Māori) Battalion”, “RNZAF”, “51 Squadron”, “Royal Air Force (RAF) unit”, “searchlights”, “casualty rate”, “prisoners of war”, “Bomber Command”, “submarine bases”, “tactics”, “Allied raids”, “Luftwaffe”, “barracks”, “Allied territory”, “watchtower”, “surrendered”, “war crime”
- Names of people and places, some in Aotearoa New Zealand and others in England and Europe
- Names of iwi: “Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangī”, “Ngāti Tūwharetoa”
- Figurative or connotative language, including “fortune finally turned against Johnny”, “his luck was bound to run out”, “the cost was great”, “fitting back into their old lives”, “up to the challenge”, “this proved to be right”, “Harry was the only hope”, “worse was to come”, “the tunnel came up short”, “the troubles continued”, “spread out on foot”, “await his fate”
- A school motto in te reo Māori and antiquated English: “Whakatangata kia kaha’ (Quit ye like men, be strong)”

Possible supporting strategies

- Identify words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to students, particularly terms relating to war and to prison camps. Select several of these words or concepts and provide a definition and/or a context for each example. Give these to pairs of students and ask them to discuss the words and match them with the definitions. Have the students share their thinking with the group, clarifying and correcting any misunderstandings.
- Give the students pictures of prisoner-of-war camps or other aspects of war that illustrate the key vocabulary or concepts you want to focus on. In small groups, have the students discuss what they can see in the pictures and list any questions they have. This activity will help introduce the vocabulary and activate the students’ prior knowledge. English language learners could do this activity in their first language before repeating it in English with another group of students.
- Some students may have difficulty understanding the use of the word “great” as in “the great escape” and “the cost [of human lives] was great”. Discuss how the meaning of words can change in different contexts.
- Remind the students of strategies for working out unknown words that are particularly useful on a first reading, such as looking for base words, recognisable chunks, and word families; using context to predict the words; and reading on to check if a word makes sense.
- Ask the students to note any unfamiliar words and spend time later clarifying their meanings.
- Have the students locate places referred to in the text, using Google Maps, or provide a map showing the territories in Europe in 1943.
- Discuss what the Te Aute College school motto means and how it relates to the story. Compare the school motto with your own school motto.
- Discuss what luck is and its significance within the context of the story. Identify the idioms the writer has used that relate to luck (good and bad).
- *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

- Some knowledge of the Second World War, including who Hitler was, who the Allies were, and where the war took place
- Some knowledge of the use of planes during the Second World War, both in terms of the vulnerability of bomber crews and the devastation caused by bombing
- Some knowledge of what a prisoner of war is and of prisoner-of-war (POW) camps
- Some knowledge of the conventions of war, for example, that prisoners should be looked after and that civilians (and their property) should not be attacked
- Some knowledge of bribes, identity papers, and forgery
- Some knowledge of the long-term impacts of being in a war, for example, war memories
- Some knowledge of racial inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand
- Some knowledge of the 28th (Māori) Battalion
- Some understanding of the sense of loss families can experience when a person is buried far from home
- Some familiarity with the features of biographies

Possible supporting strategies

- Read this text in the context of a broader study to support the students’ understanding of the Second World War and the role Māori played in the war. Explore maps showing Allied and Axis territory in 1943.
- Provide illustrations of Stalag Luft III and discuss what a POW camp is. This New Zealand History webpage provides a list of the POW camps New Zealanders were interned in during the Second World War. Explore examples of POW camps in Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, Featherston or Matiu/Somes Island.
- Make connections with the ways Māori responded to the First World War. The *School Journal* article “Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū: The Pioneer Māori Battalion” (SJ L3 June 2014) provides useful background information on race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time of the First World War. Discuss whether things had changed for Māori by the time the Second World War began.
- Discuss whether there are any international rules about what countries can and can’t do during a war. Explain what the Geneva Convention is and why it is important.
- Watch excerpts from *Turangaarere – the John Pohe Story* (2008) on NZ On Screen to give students a sense of the scale and complexity of the Great Escape.
- Discuss the impact on communities when soldiers are not able to be brought home after they die overseas. Explore contemporary examples of deceased soldiers being brought home.
- Review the features of a biography, reminding the students of other biographies they may have read in class.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- A longer text than many *School Journal* articles at this level (12 pages)
- Reliable, omniscient, third-person narration
- The use of simple, compound, and complex sentences, some of which contain a lot of information
- A generally chronological biography, with the exception of the introductory section, which foreshadows events that are about to come
- Frequent use of the passive voice
- The use of the modal verb “would” to talk about a future event in the past tense
- A number of phrasal verbs, including “bound to run out”, “bring the culprits to justice”
- Text boxes that provide additional information about Māori involvement in the Second World War and the bombing of Germany
- Visual components that support the text, such as historical photographs, illustrations, and maps
- The use of quotation marks to indicate both a quote and the name given to people who played a particular role in the prison escape (“penguins”)

Possible supporting strategies

- Have the students read the title and first paragraph and discuss what they expect to read about in this article. Support the students to use the photographs and illustrations to help them make sense of the text.
- Scan the text with the students so that they get a sense of its structure (headings, subheadings, text boxes, and images) and purpose. Ask them to examine the photographs and drawings and to use the headings to identify the focus of each section. Prompt them to notice the use of colour to differentiate between the narrative and the text boxes containing supporting information.
- Explore the use of passive voice throughout the article and the role it plays in shifting the focus from the agent of the action onto the person who was acted on. Provide examples of passive voice used in the text and have the students work in pairs to find further examples.
- Break long sentences into phrases and clauses identifying What? When? Where? Why? Who? and How? – and the relationships between each phrase or clause. Pay particular attention to the main verbs and to signals of relationships (such as cause and effect) between ideas.
- Explore the many different ways the modal verb “would” can be used. In this story, it is used to identify future outcomes of past events.
- Prompt the students to identify what the pronouns refer to, particularly for the text on page 10. If the students need support with this, select a section of text and display it. Draw circles around the pronouns and boxes around the nouns they refer back to and draw lines between them.
- Note that the *Selections 2009 Teachers’ Notes for New Zealand at War* has some useful ideas for supporting students with this type of text and topic.



Sounds and Words

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Processes and strategies: Integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies confidently to identify, form, and express ideas.

Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Level 4 – Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social studies)

Level 4 – Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.

Possible first reading purpose

- Learn about a daring and talented Māori pilot
- Learn about a famous Second World War prison escape.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- Identify the exceptional qualities of Johnny Pohe
- Identify the challenges faced by prisoners trying to escape from a prison camp
- Explore the reasons Māori signed up to fight in the Second World War and learn about race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand in the first half of the twentieth century.

Possible writing purposes

- Research and write more about the Great Escape
- Research and write about another famous escape
- Write an article about the 28th (Māori) Battalion
- Research and write an article about another Māori soldier in the Second World War.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 4 – Processes and strategies: Integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies confidently to identify, form, and express ideas; Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

First reading

- Share the purpose for reading, briefly explaining that this is a biography of a famous New Zealand pilot. Make connections to other biographies the students may have read and the types of information they tend to include, for example:
 - information about a person’s childhood and where they grew up
 - circumstances, events, or people that shaped who they are or what they did
 - key character traits of the person, supported by examples
 - obstacles they faced or overcame.
- Direct the students to skim the text to get a sense of its purpose and to find key ideas related to their reading purpose. Have them identify what the images and other features suggest about the topic and purpose of the text.
- With the students, carry out a close reading of the first paragraph. Prompt the students to think, pair, and share about the information provided. Encourage them to ask questions about Johnny Pohe and what might happen to him, based on what they have read so far. Use a group discussion to draw out background knowledge about the Second World War and/or make connections with class explorations of the war.
- Give the students the opportunity to read the text in its entirety, working with a partner and pausing at the end of each section to unpack the events and discuss anything that is unclear. Provide support as necessary.

If the students require more scaffolding

- Provide a brief overview of the Second World War, using a map of Europe in 1943 to identify the various territories. Locate the English Channel and point out how immense Nazi Germany was at that stage of the war. Explain what a prison camp is.
- Support the students to make connections between information in the text and the illustrations.
- Break the reading of the text into sections, pausing at the end of each section to check for understanding. Have the students work in pairs to answer questions about the text and to make predictions about what will happen next. Encourage them to identify with sticky notes any words that they find difficult.
- Refer to the suggestions for addressing vocabulary challenges described in the “Text and language challenges” section.
- If necessary, read the whole text using a shared-reading approach. Pause at the end of each section and model how to use strategies to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words and terms.

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

Give the students a graphic organiser to complete that outlines common features of biographies, for example, information about a person’s childhood or experiences that shaped them.

 You could use Google Slides to create this.

If necessary, model how to locate and classify information in the story. Have the students work in pairs to identify ways that Johnny’s actions reveal his character.

 Alternatively, the students could complete a biocube about Johnny Pohe, outlining key information from the text.

The teacher

Have the students work in pairs to identify the challenges Johnny and the other prisoners faced and the way they tried to overcome these. Prompt the students to consider some of the less obvious challenges, for example, the “lack of encouragement” for Māori to join the air force or navy at the time.

Discuss the role that luck (good and bad) played in the story.

The students:

- locate key biographical information about Johnny and make connections with other biographies they have read
- classify key pieces of information in the story, using a What? When? Where? Why? Who? and How? template
- locate specific information that shows how adventurous, daring, and hardworking Johnny was, for example, the speed at which he signed up to go away to war and his inclusion in the group of people who had done a lot of work on the tunnel
- synthesise the information they have found to draw conclusions about the type of person Johnny was.

The students:

- locate and evaluate the challenges Johnny and the other prisoners faced and identify ways they overcame these challenges, working together to clarify any unfamiliar terms they encounter in the process
- discuss the concept of luck and evaluate which outcomes in the story were a product of chance.

Subsequent readings (cont.)

The teacher

Prompt the students to make connections:

- within the text, for example, between the limited expectations of Māori participation in the war (page 3) and the information in the text box on page 4
- across texts, for example, between the text and “Fly” (the poem on pages 14 and 15) or “Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū: The Pioneer Māori Battalion” (SJ L3 June 2014).

The students:

- identify facts from the story that have been woven into the poem
- compare and discuss discrimination towards Māori in the First and Second World Wars, in terms of conscription and of the expectations of how Māori could contribute
- make connections between the role Āpirana Ngata played in each war and his purpose for encouraging Māori to fight and evaluate these actions
- integrate information in the text(s) with what they understand about New Zealand’s history and society and reflect on what they have learnt.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You’ve done a great job at evaluating the role of luck in the story, finding examples of things that were out of the prisoners’ control. Like you, I wish the story had a different ending. You’ve made some moving connections to how you feel about war and how sad it is that people like Johnny didn’t make it back home.*

METACOGNITION

- *How did the story line up with the predictions you made at the start of the story? How well did it answer your questions? What questions do you still have?*
- *How did knowing from the beginning that things weren’t going to work out well for Johnny influence your thinking as you read the story?*



Reading standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics; Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

Text excerpts from “Johnny Pohe and the Great Escape”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 2

Despite being a prisoner, Johnny didn't accept that his war was over. He took part in an ambitious escape that would end tragically for himself and many others ...

FORESHADOWING

Foreshadowing is a writing device that gives readers a hint of what will come later in a story. Foreshadowing can be used to draw readers into a story by creating a sense of anticipation or curiosity.

Ask the students to evaluate the effectiveness of the introduction. Discuss why the writer lets readers know that the story they are about to read has a tragic ending.

Have the students look for other examples of foreshadowing, for example, the final sentence on page 5 or the phrase “Worse was to come” on page 11. Discuss the impact of these.

Prompt the students to try using foreshadowing in their own writing and then to get feedback from their peers on:

- whether it makes the reader want to find out more
- whether they have provided too much or too little information
- whether the ending lives up to any sense of drama created by their foreshadowing of events.

DIGITAL TOOLS

The students could use Google Docs for this as it allows the feedback to be reviewed later on as well as face to face.

Page 11

At 1 a.m., there was another hitch: the tunnel collapsed. The men worked desperately to repair it, and the escape continued. Then, at 4.55 a.m., the seventy-seventh man – another New Zealander – was spotted by a guard. He surrendered.

USING A MIX OF SENTENCE LENGTHS

Using a range of sentence lengths can add a sense of rhythm and flow to writing. Long complex or compound sentences can provide readers with a lot of information in a concise way. Short, simple sentences can be used for dramatic effect.

Explore the structure of selected sentences from the text, including the use of colons and dashes. Model how to analyse sentences, for example, the way dashes are used to add information about the subject of the main clause. Have the students practise identifying:

- the main clause in complex sentences
- separate clauses in compound sentences.

Remind the students that, when writing long sentences, it's important to check that there is a main clause that can stand alone and make sense by itself.

Give the students simple sentences and have them work in pairs to add subordinate clauses and/or adverbial phrases that provide related information and/or describe when, where, or how something happened.

Have the students identify short sentences used in the text and their impact, for example, how they grab attention or emphasise an idea.

Prompt them to identify ways to vary the length of sentences they use as they develop and edit drafts of their own writing.

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics; Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.

Text excerpts from “Johnny Pohe and the Great Escape”

Page 12

... When **Johnny was finally picked up** several days later, his feet had frostbite.

The escape was a disaster. **Seventy-three men were captured**, including Johnny. Only three made it back to England. Along with others, **Johnny was taken to a town called Gorlitz** to await his fate.

Examples of text characteristics

PASSIVE VOICE

A verb is in the passive voice when the subject is “acted on” by the verb instead of being the agent of the verb (the person or thing that does something).

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Revise the use of passive voice and explore how it shifts the focus onto the person (or thing) that has the action done to them rather than the one who acts (the agent).

If necessary, let the students practice with examples, such as:

- The dog *ate* the ice cream.
- The ice cream *was eaten* by the dog.

Have them work in pairs to identify which sentence of each pair has an active voice and which is passive before moving on to identify examples of passive voice in the text (there is at least one example in every paragraph).

Discuss common reasons for using the passive voice, for example:

- when the agent of the action is unknown
- to avoid responsibility, for example, “the window was broken” rather than “I broke the window”
- to avoid providing unnecessary information, for example, “the rubbish has been collected”.

Explore the way passive voice is used in the story and discuss why, in many cases, the agent of the action is hard to identify. Use the text on page 3 as an example: “Māori were expected to go into the army, just like they had in the First World War. They weren’t encouraged to join the air force or navy.”

Ask: *Who expected Māori to join the army? Who didn’t encourage Māori to join the air force or navy?*

Have the students test out variations of passive and active voice in their own writing, reading aloud what they have written to get a sense of its effect.

Reinforce that the use of passive voice has a particular purpose. It may be helpful to discuss the effect of overusing passive voice in a written text.

Changing a sentence from active to passive voice can be tricky for some students, so break the process down into steps:

1. Put the passive noun (the object) before the verb.
2. a) Put the active noun (the subject) after the verb and add “by” just in front of it; or b) discard the active noun.
3. Add “to be” in front of the main verb (in the same form as the main verb)
4. Change the main verb to the past participle form.
(TESOL International Association)

This [video clip](#) explains the process in simple language. English language learners may need explicit instruction and practice in using the verb “to be”.

METACOGNITION

- *Is foreshadowing more effective when the outcome of something is bad than when the outcome is good? Why or why not? When might foreshadowing have a negative effect on your writing? What are some ways that you can test out the effectiveness of different approaches?*

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *It’s good to see you experimenting with different types of sentences. Now see if you can make some of your sentences more concise. Ask your partner if there are any sentences that still contain too much detail.*



Writing standard: by the end of year 8



The Literacy Learning Progressions