

The Kōrero of the Waka

— by Keri Welham —

Kaiwaka is a small town in Northland. It's about two hours from Auckland. The town is on State Highway 1, the main road that runs from the top of Aotearoa all the way to the bottom. At the front of Kaiwaka School is a waka tāngata – a people's canoe. It's 25 metres long and has a big platform. Students use this platform to perform kapa haka, play with friends, and sometimes enjoy quiet time.

Designing the waka

The waka is named after the school's kapa haka group, Te Waka Rangimārie o Kaiwaka (rangimārie means peace). It was designed by a school parent, Benji Woodman, with help from other parents and students. Benji wanted the waka to include whakairo (carvings). “The waka welcomes people to our school,” Benji explains. “The carvings are an important part of the waka. They tell stories about the Kaiwaka area.”





Carving the waka

Tim Codyre is a well-known carver. He created a carving for each end of the waka – the taurapa (stern post) and the tuere (prow). It took Tim three months to finish them.

The carvings include images of:

- Pukekaroro (the mountain of the local hapū, Te-Uri-o-Hau)
- waves from the Kaipara Harbour
- sports gear
- a computer mouse
- pages of a book with greetings in several languages.



Tim also added some designs known as pākati (notches). These repeating patterns are often used in whakairo. One of the pākati is the diamond-shaped pātiki (flounder). For hundreds of years, Kaipara Harbour has provided food, including pātiki, for the people who live around it, so Tim made sure to include some pātiki designs.

Look at the photos of the waka. Can you see eels? Can you see the manaia? (It's a creature with the head of a bird and the body of a human.)



Adding to the waka

The school will be 150 years old in 2020. Principal Sharlene Tornquist says many of the celebrations will happen on and around the waka.



Ben Hita is a kaumātua of local iwi Ngāti Whātua. He held a ceremony at the school when the waka was finished in 2019. “The carvings are a very simple lesson in whakairo,” Mātua Ben says. “They are about the children of the school. The students now have their own waka, and they can add their own stories to it. The kōrero of this waka will go on and on – it will change and grow with every child.”

My favourite part of the waka is the carvings. I can see “hello” written in different languages. We use the waka as a place to talk and play. Sometimes we pretend the waka is a big ship.

I can see waves and shapes and people.

When I arrive at school, I wait at the waka for my friends. At lunchtime, we throw our jackets over the paddles to make a house. Our town is called Kaiwaka. Kai means food and waka means canoe, so it makes sense we should have a waka at our school!



Learning the Art of Whakairo

Tim Codyre is Pākehā, but he learnt whakairo from a master carver named Alan Nopera. “I was really lucky,” Tim says. “I always wanted to carve. Māori carving has given me so many rich experiences.”

Learning the art of whakairo takes many hundreds of hours. First, you learn how to carve a perfectly straight line. Then you learn how to create spirals. Little by little, you learn the techniques, the traditions, and the vocabulary of Māori carving.

Tim says that the traditional patterns all have their own meaning and can be used to tell stories. These days, some carvers also include everyday images and designs in their work.

Tim has been a carver for more than thirty years. He has worked on meeting houses, carved family taonga, and created some large model canoes. In the 1990s, Tim even used his carving skills to build props for a television show. He carved mermaids and warriors out of polystyrene (a type of plastic foam often used for packing). One time, he even carved a huge dragon. It was as big as a room, and an actor came riding out of its mouth on a motorbike!

Whakairo is part of how we tell our history. As new generations learn the skills of whakairo, they can carry on recording the stories of Aotearoa New Zealand.



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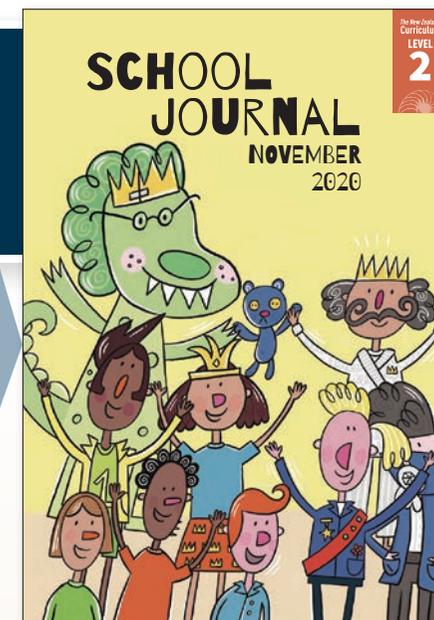
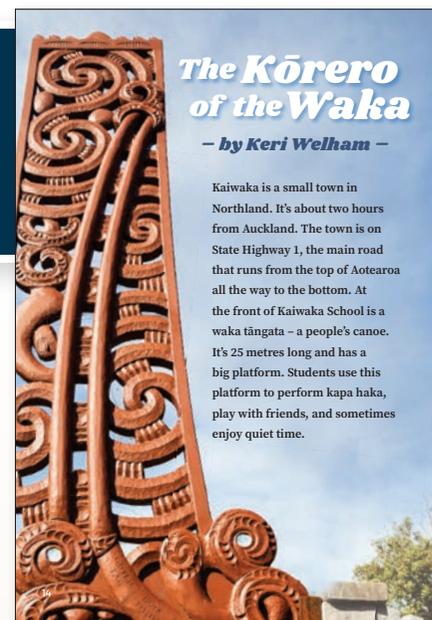
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