



Teacher's Notes

Written by Isobel Joy Te Aho-White

Story Summary

From sleeping giants to battling mountains, fiery sisters to adventurous trees, dig into *Whenua* and discover eleven tales of how Aotearoa was formed beneath our feet.

Whenua takes readers back in time with each pūrākau, exploring the ways in which Aotearoa's land was formed and introducing children to legendary Māori figures and atua. A beautifully illustrated collection that will delight the whole whānau, from award-winning illustrator Isobel Joy Te Aho-White.

Author Biography

Isobel Joy Te Aho-White



Isobel Joy Te Aho-White (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa) is an award-winning illustrator based in Pōneke, Aotearoa. She incorporates kowhaiwhai and native New Zealand plant life into most of her work. She has worked on over 30 children's books and won the Whitley best children's book award in 2020 for *Whiti: Colossal Squid of the Deep*. This is her debut as an author.

Pūrākau

The New Zealand Ministry of Education defines pūrākau as traditional Māori narratives, ancient stories, and oral histories. Rather than being simple myths or legends, they are vital repositories of cultural knowledge that shape historical accounts and provide essential teachings.

Key aspects of their definition include:

- **Sources of Knowledge (Mātauranga Māori):** Pūrākau pass down ancestral knowledge about whakapapa (genealogy), the environment, values, and the origins of the Māori world.
- **Cultural Guides:** They teach moral development, explain relationships with the natural world, and guide how people should behave, live, and relate to others.
- **Historical Reality:** From the Māori perspective, pūrākau are not fables; they are accounts of actual events that provide a historical continuum for whānau, hapū, and iwi.
- **Pedagogical Tools:** The Ministry emphasizes their use in the curriculum (from Early Childhood Education up to NCEA) as powerful ways to explore cultural identity, language, and shared meaning

Suggested Shared Reading Questions

The Waka of Aoraki

- Why was Aoraki the leader of the brothers?
- Why couldn't the brothers catch any fish?
- What caused the waka to fall from the sky?
- What name are the brothers known by now?

Rākaihautū and Tuhiraki

- Who left together on the raft?
- What was the purpose of their journey?
- What was the challenge that Rakinui set Rākaihautū?
- What name did Rākaihautū give his kō after the work they had done together was completed?

The Sleeping Giants

- What did Rapuwai's mother warn the cousins would happen if they went too far from the village?
- What did the villagers think you had to do to kill a Kāhui Tipua?
- What were the cousins hoping to gain by going on their adventure?
- What did the cousins take with them?
- What are the baskets of kūmera that washed ashore known as now?

Poutini and Waitaiki

- What is the one thing Poutini is scared of?
- How did Tama-ahua work out where his wife had gone?
- What did Poutini do to Waitaiki when he smelled the humans coming for him? Why did he do it?
- What did Tama-ahua do to make sure Waitaiki would always be home?

The Fiery Sisters

- What does Ngātoroirangi do each time he creates something new?
- Who does Ngātoroirangi call when he is overwhelmed by the cold?
- How do his sisters get to him?
- How is Tamatea allowed to go wherever he pleases?
- How was Oamaru stone created?
- What was one of Tamatea's achievements?

Ngake and Whātaimai

- What is the North Island named after?
- How do Ngake and Whātaimai find out about the ocean?
- Why do Ngake and Whātaimai leave the lake?
- What did Whātaimai's spirit change into?

The Battle for Pīhanga

- Why did many come to the foot of Pīhanga?
- Why did the mountains fight? Which mountain won?
- What lives in the Whanganui River?
- What are the descendants of Pīhanga and Tongariro?

Okatia

- List five trees that live near Te Matau-a-Māui.
- Where does the spirit of Okatia live?
- What was Okatia envious of? Why?
- What remains now to show the power of the tōtara and Okatia?

Tararua

- List the birds that appear in this story. How many have you seen?
- Why did Whātonga leave Hotuwaipara?
- Why did Whātonga leave his second wife?
- Who forgave Whātonga?
- What did Whātonga name the mountains? Who are they named after?

The Whales of Wairoa

- Who were the people of Wairoa scared of?
- How did the tohunga (who the people were too scared to say his name) find out all the information about what had happened and what was going to happen?
- What did the whales do to make the tohunga so angry?
- Where is Hikunui now?

The Rage of Mataaho

- List three things you know about Tūrehu and three things you know about Patupaiarehe.
- Describe the game that the rangatira liked to play.
- How did Hui meet Wairere?
- How did the Tūrehu defend themselves when they saw the Patupaiarehe coming?
- Who was left after Mataaho and Rūaumoko became angry?

Suggested Activities

Author study - biography

Isobel Joy Te Aho-White is both the author and the illustrator of this book. Using information from the beginning and end of the book write a paragraph sharing what you know about her. Research her and write another paragraph sharing what else you have learnt about her. You might include information about other books she has written or illustrated.

Story Starter

There are so many interesting and dynamic characters in the book. Choose one or two and write them into another adventure. You can research them to find out more information before you begin your story or use what you already know. If it's hard to get started, consider what might have happened next to a character you liked and start from there.

Playing Whai - you will need a length of string or something similar tied in a loop

Whai are games played with a length of string tied to form a circle. The origin of whai is credited to Māui. When put over the hands, hooked over the thumbs and little fingers, and pulled taut but not tight, a rectangular loop is formed to make the whai pattern. Below are some short videos showing you some examples of whai for you to try.

[Mahi Whai - Te Whitu o Matariki](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ueyo6eHsae0)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ueyo6eHsae0>

[Mahi Whai - Puanga me Te Kāhui Tautoru](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgLfUbHs9mU)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgLfUbHs9mU>

[Mahi Whai - Te Iwa o Matariki](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URJn6JQsgIE)

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Sharing the myth with sound

- you will need a printed or digital version of the chosen story to annotate the sounds

In pairs or a small group work together to retell the story from the book. One person is the narrator and the others use body percussion and their voice to add in the sound effects. Work together to plan the appropriate sound effects. Decide on a symbol for each sound and add it to story so that everyone remembers what you decided and can perform the story for others.

Local Legend - you will need a grid to make your cartoon

Research a local myth or legend and retell it in a cartoon style. Include speech bubbles so the reader can gain greater understanding. Before you start think about who or what needs to be included in your story and what the main events are. You won't be able to include every detail so think about what can be left out.