

## ILLUSTRATING THE READING STANDARD

**“Pacific Paradise?”** *School Journal*, Part 4 Number 2, 2010

*Noun frequency level: 11–13*

By the end of year 8, students are required to use a range of fiction and non-fiction texts to locate, evaluate, and synthesise information and ideas in order to meet the reading demands of the curriculum, drawing on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes described for the end of year 8 in the Literacy Learning Progressions. The curriculum tasks will also involve the students in generating their own questions as well as answering questions from the teacher.

The students in a year 7 and 8 class are involved in an integrated inquiry into how people’s decisions and actions can impact on other life forms. In small groups, they have selected an endangered species within the New Zealand environment and identified the environmental and human actions that have put the species’ survival at risk.

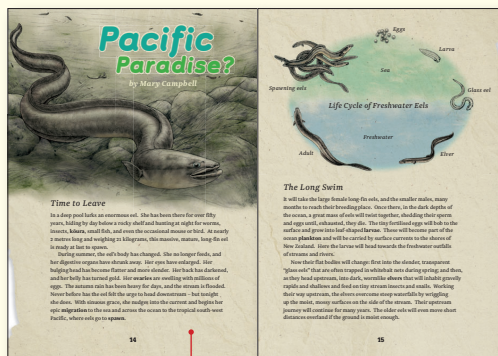
“Pacific Paradise?” describes factors that impact on the survival of native New Zealand eels. The information is organised in a mixed-text format (narrative and non-fiction), which is supported by

photos, captions, illustrations, and a glossary of the scientific and topic-specific vocabulary.

The teacher chose “Pacific Paradise?” because its topic of the disappearing eel and the description of the human-induced changes in the eel’s environment support the curriculum learning focus. The students read the text by themselves to locate ideas and information about the causes of the environmental changes and their effects in terms of their impact on the ongoing survival of New Zealand eels. They evaluate and synthesise this information and use it to decide on specific actions that individuals and communities could take to prevent the native eels from becoming extinct.

*The following example illustrates aspects of the task and text and demonstrates how a student engages with both task and text to meet the reading demands of the curriculum. A number of such examples would be used to inform the overall teacher judgment for this student.*

The student reads the headings and skims each paragraph to identify that the first two sections tell the story of a female eel’s journey to and from the Pacific Ocean, that the next section provides factual information about the characteristics of New Zealand eel species, and that the last section describes how eel habitats are being destroyed.



The student poses several questions to focus her reading, such as “What sorts of conditions do these eels need to live and breed?” “What is happening to their environment and why?” “How is this affecting the eels?” “What can be done to reverse what is happening?”

Nowadays, few eels make it to maturity ... Ninety-five percent of our swamps and wetlands have been drained.

Lowland streams have silted up and become warm, muddy, and polluted with fertilisers and farm animal waste. Because of the poor condition of the streams, there are fewer kōura and native fish such as inanga and kōkopu, which larger eels need to eat.

The installation of flood banks, floodgates, and pumping stations on rivers continues with no concern about the destruction of eel habitats. Hydro dams and other water reservoirs block the migration of elvers upstream. And many of those elvers ... are killed

Aotearoa is not the paradise it once was ... Because of the poor condition of the streams ...

The student closely reads the text to locate information related to her purpose for reading and collates this information in a graphic organiser. She then summarises and synthesises her information to conclude that there are many points in the eels’ development that leave them vulnerable to changes in their environment, that a wide range of human actions impact on their survival at all stages, and that people initiate a chain of events leading to the eel’s demise.

The student notices the author’s negative tone and use of emotive language at various places across the text. She infers the author’s concern that many people don’t care that they are destroying eel habitats, even though this may lead to the eels’ extinction. She evaluates this point of view by thinking critically about whether people don’t care or whether they are not aware that their actions are having such an impact on eels’ ability to survive.

The student makes connections to other texts she has read, including online texts, and synthesises information about the effects of human-induced environmental changes on a wide range of species. From this information, she infers that more publicity is needed to ensure that people notice the impact they have on the environment of all native species. She sets up a class wiki to gather ideas from her peers about how to raise community awareness of the need to protect New Zealand’s native eels.