# Kahawai

by Paul Mason

## Overview

"Kahawai" is set in an unfamiliar time and place (a much-changed Auckland in a not-so-distant future), but it conveys familiar ideas about sustainability, selflessness for the greater good, and co-operation in times of hardship. Āreta, and her grandmother, Trish, go fishing on a filthy sea and make a surprising catch. Students familiar with Auckland will recognise the setting and draw on prior knowledge about climate change to infer that the changes (Mt Eden as an island, Sky Tower as a lighthouse) are due to a rise in sea levels.

The fishing expedition and the difference between the expected and the actual catch require students to make inferences about the hardships in this fictional time and place. The tension builds as Āreta and Trish decide what to do with their catch: should they satisfy their immediate needs or make a sacrifice that could have long-term benefits? The use of resources for individual or community good is an understated but powerful theme in this story.

**Texts related by theme**  **"Frogs"** SJ L4 May 2013 | **"Frogs"** SJSL 2013 | **"The Bittern"** SJ 3.1.09

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# Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

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

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

"This'll do," said Trish when at last they had reached one of the pillars. The turbine turned lazily above them, enormous fins slicing the air. Āreta took the rope, and they looped it around the base, pulling tight. Trish hauled the oars in and sat there catching her breath, her chest rising and falling like the boat.

"Your uncle Roger had a good catch the other day," she said at last.

"What'd he get?"

"Tyres, two of them. Man down at the market gave him $75 for the pair."

"Do you think we might get lucky like that?" Āreta gazed at the murky water. It didn't look promising.

"There's only one way to find out," said Trish. She stood, legs unsteady, and swung the large grappling hook back and forth and then out over the side – as far as she could. Slowly, she began to reel it back in, not wasting her breath on talking. Āreta gathered the net and checked the weights. It needed to sink right to the bottom, where the good salvage lay. She flung the net over the side, plastic mesh twirling in the air, and watched it disappear below the surface. She'd give it a few minutes, then haul the net back in.

Across the water, towards the city, the Sky Tower lighthouse jutted through the haze. Āreta could just make out Mt Eden Island. She tried to imagine what the city looked like in the old days, before the water had grown big; before all the computers had crashed and died and life became hard for everybody.

Āreta began pulling on the rope. It felt different. Something was caught in the net.

"It feels light, whatever it is," Trish said, tugging the rope.

"A tyre?"

"No chance – but it's something. Come on, pull!"

The two of them hauled on the rope, hand over hand. With a final heave, the net was out of the water and in the boat. Trish picked through the mesh, then fell back. "It can't be!" she whispered. "It can't!"

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

sentences that vary in length and structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

# Possible curriculum contexts

**SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social Studies)**

Level 3 – Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.

**ENGLISH (Reading)**

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

**ENGLISH (Writing)**

Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

**Possible reading purposes**

- To enjoy reading a sci-fi story with a New Zealand setting

- To consider how daily survival might change in a post-apocalyptic future

- To explore how a writer uses familiar features in unfamiliar ways for impact.

**Possible writing purposes**

- To use the text as a model for another futuristic story

- To respond to the story in a different way, for example, in a poem or song

- To make comparisons between a familiar location now and what it might look like in a distant future.

See Instructional focus – Reading for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See Instructional focus – Writing for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

 **The New Zealand Curriculum**

# Text and language challenges

**VOCABULARY:**

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including "stern", "derelict", "adjusting", "the swell", "brim", "pillars", "grappling hook", "salvage", "jutted", "sensing", "heave", "thrashed", "radiation", "flailing", "gesturing"

- The metaphors: "felt she could melt", "this bucket", "to use sweat", "fins slicing through the air", "catching her breath", "smile faded" and simile: "giggling like a school girl"

- The colloquial language: "reckon", "Hop in", "back in the day", "get lucky", "Mind it doesn't get out", "No way"

- The descriptive adjectives: "filthy", "derelict", "ignored", "dirty", "baggy", "regular", "murky"

- The descriptive verbs, including "dragged", "grumbled", "adjusting", "hauled", "picking", "slicing", "gazed", "flung".

**Possible supporting strategies**

Identify any words you may need to pre-teach, keeping in mind that some students may prefer to read the story independently before going back to clarify meanings.

Make a list of words that will be important for understanding the story and use strategies to teach them before reading, for example, by:

- exploring one class of words at a time (verbs, adjectives) to help students understand how and why they are used

- identifying words that relate to one idea, such as the setting.

Some of the students may need support to understand the colloquial language and figurative expressions. Ask them to suggest similar expressions in their own language and compare them.

**SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:**

- Familiarity with the genre of post-apocalyptic science fiction

- Knowledge of Auckland landmarks: Sky Tower, Mt Eden, wind turbines

- Knowledge or experience of fishing from a small boat

- Understanding the concepts of climate change and what it might mean in the future.

**Possible supporting strategies**

Remind the students of stories they may know that have a future setting. Discuss their features. You could introduce the concept of "post-apocalyptic" and explain that some stories are set in a future time when the world has changed in drastic, terrible ways. Ask them to make connections to any post-apocalyptic novels they may have read.

After the first reading, ask the students to share what they know of the Auckland landmarks.

**TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:**

- Dramatic fiction story, set in the future

- Use of dialogue

- The use of irony ("Danger. Polluted water. Unsafe.")

- Unexpected connections, such as "a good catch" to mean "tyres"

- The need to make inferences about the conditions and the way the main characters survive.

**Possible supporting strategies**

As the students begin to read, support them to identify the setting and the characters. Some of the students may need support to pick up the clues that the story is set in the future and that something terrible has happened. Rather than spoil the impact of the story's plot, use a second reading to locate clues and make inferences. However, students who find the text challenging often benefit from previewing a text orally. For these students, you could give pairs copies of selected illustrations (not the last couple) and ask them to note what they see and what they predict about the setting, characters, and events. Record their ideas, feeding in key vocabulary. Have the students check and revise their predictions as they read.

Create a graphic organiser to help the students keep track of their predictions and questions. Give the students time to fill in the graphic organiser as they read each section. They could do this with a partner and then share their ideas with other pairs. Allow the students who share another language to work together and discuss their ideas in that language.

 **Sounds and Words**

# Instructional focus – Reading

**Social Sciences** (Level 3 – Social studies: Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.)

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

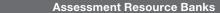| Text excerpts from "Kahawai" | Students (what they might do) | Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching) |
|---|---|---|
| They dragged the old … pulling at the front. It was hot … so hot Āreta felt she could melt.<br><br>"Keep pushing, mokopuna," Trish called. "The sooner we get this bucket on the water the better."<br><br>"What do you reckon we're going to catch today?" Āreta asked.<br><br>"Who knows?" grumbled Trish. "We could catch anything in this filthy moana." | Students **make inferences** about the setting, the characters, and the plot. They identify the relationship between Āreta and Trish, and **infer** they are going fishing. They **ask questions** about the setting. They wonder why Trish and Āreta are going fishing in filthy water and **infer** that something bad has happened. They **make connections** between the text and other sci-fi stories to **infer** that this story is set in a future where conditions are very grim. They begin to **form hypotheses**. | Before reading, you could set up an organiser to record and check predictions. Alternatively, you could ask the students to maintain their own organiser.<br><br>**PROMPT** the students to make some "first impressions" predictions.<br>• Look at the images on page 22–23. What kind of story will this be?<br>• We will write your predictions and check and amend them as we read.<br><br>**TELL** the students to read the story once, making and checking predictions.<br>• Remember to use your other reading strategies, such as asking questions and searching for answers.<br><br>**DIRECT** the students to reread this extract and ask questions to support thinking.<br>• When you first read this, what predictions and inferences did you make about the setting (in time and space), the characters, and the plot?<br>• What questions were you asking?<br>• How accurate were your predictions?<br>• Did the author want his readers to work these things out themselves? Why?<br>• What hypotheses were you forming about why everything is so bad? |
| "Your Uncle Roger had a good catch the other day," she said at last.<br><br>"What'd he get?"<br><br>"Tyres, two of them. Man down at the market gave him $75 for the pair."<br><br>"Do you think we might get lucky like that?" Āreta gazed at the murky water. It didn't look promising. | The students may be surprised by the unexpected response to Āreta's question. They **ask questions** of the text and **integrate** information to **infer** that Trish and Āreta are not looking for fish – they are looking for items they can sell. They confirm their **prediction** that the story is set in a time when people struggle to survive. They **make connections** between the text and what they know about relative values to **infer** that Trish and Āreta don't usually find much to sell. | English language learners, in particular, are likely to benefit from preparation and thinking in answering some of the complex questions about this text. Use strategies such as "think, pair, share" to provide opportunities for preparation and thinking.<br><br>**ASK QUESTIONS** to support the students to make connections and inferences.<br>• What do people usually fish for?<br>• What would "a good catch" usually be?<br>• What did you expect Uncle Roger's catch to be?<br>• Why does Āreta hope they will "get lucky"?<br>• What is the author showing us about the sea? |
| "But if we take it, that might be the end," she said slowly. "Mightn't it?"<br><br>Trish nodded. "Yes, I expect so." The smile faded from her lips.<br><br>…<br><br>"But maybe they wouldn't," pleaded Āreta. "Maybe one day, there'll be a whole school of kahawai."<br><br>Trish nodded again. "I guess there might be." Her voice was now a whisper. | The students use their knowledge of reading dialogue to follow the speakers' lines. They **visualise** the reactions and changes during the brief discussion, **making connections** between the text and a time when they had to persuade someone to change their mind.<br><br>The students **integrate** information from the text and their background knowledge to **infer** the meaning of "the end". They further **infer** that Āreta believes it is possible to save kahawai, starting with one fish. | **EXPLAIN** that a useful reading strategy is to ask questions as you read.<br>**MODEL** some possible questions.<br>• Why did Trish think that Uncle Roger's catch was good?<br>• Why are they fishing for things like tyres?<br>• Do any fish live in the murky water? What would it mean if there were no fish left in the sea?<br><br>**PROMPT** the students to analyse this extract with a partner.<br>• What is happening? What is each character thinking? How do you know that?<br>• What is changing in their relationship?<br>• How do their different ages and experiences affect their thinking?<br>• From what you already know about conservation, what does Āreta hope might happen?<br>• What are the survival risks for Āreta and Trisha and for the kahawai?<br><br>**GIVE FEEDBACK**<br>• You identified places where you made and changed your predictions as you read the first time. You had a good reason each time you changed a prediction. |

**METACOGNITION**
- What new ideas or details did you notice when you reread the story? How does rereading help you with understanding a complex story?
- How did making connections with fishing and Auckland help you understand the story?
- How did you decide what the author's purpose was? Do you think he has achieved his purpose? Why do you think that?

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**Social Sciences** (Level 3 – Social studies: Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.)

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

| Text excerpts from "Kahawai" | Examples of text characteristics | Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching) |
|---|---|---|
| | **AUDIENCE**<br><br>*Writers always write with an audience in mind. This audience will determine the style that the writer uses.* | **ASK QUESTIONS** to support the students' writing intentions.<br><br>• How will you make decisions about your topic, purpose, and audience?<br><br>• If your setting is very unusual, what clues will you need to plan so your audience can make inferences?<br><br>• How will you keep your audience in mind as you write?<br><br>• Work with a buddy to give each other critical feedback. |
| Across the water, towards the city, the Sky Tower lighthouse jutted through the haze. Āreta could just make out Mt Eden Island. She tried to imagine what the city looked like in the old days, before the water had grown big; before all the computers crashed and died and life became hard for everybody. | **SHOW, DON'T TELL**<br><br>*Showing, rather than telling, allows the reader to participate. By providing clues and thinking about the audience's background knowledge, the writer can show events or details without having to explain them all.*<br><br>**ADVERBIAL PHRASES AND CLAUSES**<br><br>*These act like adverbs, telling us when, how, why, or where. Writers often put an adverbial phrase or clause at the start of a sentence for impact.* | **PROMPT** the students to consider the impact they want to have on their audience. Some of the students will need more support than others, but most students should be able to use a range of techniques to create a particular impact. Focus on the subtle techniques in writing, for example, requiring the audience to make inferences.<br><br>• Check your writing with your buddy. Are there any details that are not needed because the reader will already know them?<br><br>• Are you allowing your readers to work some things out for themselves?<br><br>**MODEL** rewriting the third sentence as four separate sentences, each starting with "She tried to imagine what the city looked like …" The adverbial clauses form the second part of each sentence (for example, "… in the old days", "… before the water had grown big", and so on).<br><br>• If I rewrite this complex sentence into a series of shorter sentences, it changes the impact. The adverbial clauses show the time Āreta is thinking about – a time "when" (in the old days; before).<br><br>• I wonder what effect the writer wanted by putting these into one sentence?<br><br>• How are you making your writing have an impact on your audience? |
| "It feels light, whatever it is," Trish said, tugging the rope.<br><br>"A tyre?"<br><br>"No chance – but it's something. Come on, pull."<br><br>The two of them hauled on the rope, hand over hand. With a final heave, the net was out of the water and in the boat. Trish picked through the mesh, then fell back. "It can't be," she whispered. "It can't!" | **DIALOGUE**<br><br>*Dialogue helps move a story along and gives insight into a person's character and to the relationships between characters.* | **ASK QUESTIONS** to support the writing of dialogue.<br><br>• What actions or ideas can you show through dialogue, rather than description?<br><br>• Will you tell your audience exactly what is happening, or will the dialogue give hints?<br><br>• How will your characters "sound"? What words and expressions would they use if they were really talking?<br><br>• How do the characters get along with each other? Can you show this in the way you write their dialogue?<br><br>**GIVE FEEDBACK**<br><br>• As you drafted and redrafted, you made changes that give the writing more impact and that help you to achieve your purpose. Most writers work just like this.<br><br>• You've assumed your audience knows this setting well and will understand where the action takes place. Therefore you've taken out some details that they won't need. That was a good way to sharpen the focus and impact of the story. |

**METACOGNITION**

• How did having an audience in mind affect how you wrote?

• How did you keep your purpose in mind as you wrote? Did this work?

• What kind of feedback was of most use to you? How did your writing change after you received feedback?

Writing standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions