

Wobbling

by Witi Ihimaera

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Overview

In this delightful autobiography, Witi Ihimaera recalls his life as a boy moving towards adulthood. He uses the metaphor of learning to ride a bicycle – and wobbling while doing so – to describe his experiences.

This text provides many opportunities for students to make connections with their own experiences of growing up, particularly the feeling that they don't fit in. An audio version of this story is available on the *School Journal Part 3 and Part 4 CD 2006–2007*. “Wobbling” is also available on the electronic storybook *Plastic Fantastic? and other stories* for year 7–10 students. It has accompanying teachers' notes.

Suggested teaching purposes

- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of making connections and **analysing and synthesising**.
- To engage the students with this text's ideas about belonging and being in new situations.

Suggested learning goal

I am learning to look for examples of ways that authors effectively convey meaning in texts.

Success criteria

I will be successful when I have:

- identified the links to the idea of wobbling in this text
- discussed the effect of the wobbling metaphor
- considered how the metaphor of wobbling helps my understanding of the text.

Features of the text

What features of this text support the teaching purposes?

- The autobiographical text form
- The extended “wobbling” metaphor – how the author relates learning to ride a bicycle with finding his place in the world, and relates balancing on Māori and Pākehā legs with navigating the territory between the two cultures
- The descriptions of selected episodes from the author's life
- The choice of starting point (intermediate school) and what this indicates about when life became more challenging for the author
- The message at the end that everyone wobbles but that wobbling needn't

hold you back

- The eminence of the author (including his connection with the film *Whale Rider*)
- The importance of whakapapa (genealogical ties) in the author's development
- The frog metaphor ("big frog in a small pond" and "small frog in a big pond") and how this supports the wobbling metaphor
- The personal voice and humour
- The vivid verbs, including alternatives to "said" and other expressive language, for example, "mumble", "veered", "swerving", "tangling", "crashing", "careering", "spluttered", "grumble", "intone"
- The rhetorical questions that the author uses to engage the reader – "But was I to blame for being such an astute businessman?", "Why did I like going to Whāngārā?"
- The section headings.

Readability

Noun frequency level: 9.5–10.5 years for guided reading

What prior knowledge or experience might help my students to read this text?

- Their feelings of being between cultures, of not fitting in, or apprehensiveness about a new environment
- Their knowledge about the author (including his connection with the film *Whale Rider*)
- Their experiences of relationships with family and friends.

What text features might challenge my students and require a prompt or a brief explanation?

- Particular words and concepts, including "flashed by", "filled me with gloom", "veered", "swerving", "sounded like me", "dispatch office", "stowed", "careering", "scrag", "wage", "rotter", "astute", "bound", "scolded", "metaphorically", "intone", "consulted", "draped", "matinee", "Majestic", "undignified", "tailwind", "ancestors", "erected", "clear over".

Preparation for reading

Ask the students to do one of the following tasks the day before reading the text.

Introduce the task by telling the students you will be giving them a text to read that involves a metaphor.

- Revisit what a metaphor is by reading a familiar poem that contains a simple metaphor or metaphors. You could also have the students practise composing phrases, sentences, or poems that use simple metaphors. (Making connections)
- You could have the students do a first reading of the text, supporting them with the vocabulary and any other difficulties and encouraging them to make

connections with the experiences. (Inferring; making connections)

A framework for the lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the learning goal?

Before reading

- Revisit the students' pre-reading task on metaphors. Brainstorm what an extended metaphor might be. (Making connections)
- If the students didn't read the text earlier, introduce the author and the fact that this text is an autobiography. Encourage the students to share their knowledge of Witi Ihimaera and autobiographies. "What else has Witi Ihimaera written? What other autobiographies have you read?" (Making connections)
- Consider the title and illustration on the first page. "I wonder what 'wobbling' refers to?" "Could there be any other meaning?" "Let's find out." (Forming and testing hypotheses)
- Share the learning goal and success criteria with the students.

During reading

Refer to Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8, pages 80–93, for information about deliberate acts of teaching.

- Have the students read each section and then discuss each one separately. Remind them to look for the extended metaphor and deeper meanings of the title. (These things go hand in hand.) Help them to identify the "wobbles", using a graphic organiser if this is useful. Prompt the students with questions like those below.
 - "First of all, a bike": "How is Witi doing on his bike? Does this confirm or change what you thought about the title?"
 - "Then a job delivering newspapers": "How is Witi getting on with his friends? Is everything going smoothly? What word could you use to describe how he's doing?"
 - "Becoming a small frog": Focus on the final sentence. "In what way is Witi wobbling here? Draw attention to the grandmother's metaphor. "What does she mean?" Also discuss possible meanings of the two frog metaphors and how they relate to the idea of wobbling. "Have you found an extended meaning for the title?"
 - "And then there was the *School Journal*": "I've noticed a sentence that makes the extended metaphor clear – can you find it?" You could also discuss the other possible "wobbles" here – in relation to Witi's friend (when he dives behind the cactuses) and his use of big words. Consider whether the latter is a wobble or not.
- "Paikea, the whale rider": "What do you notice about the wobbling metaphor

here?" Draw out the idea that Witi is learning to cope with challenges such as cycling to Whāngārā (literal) as well as being part of two cultures and preparing to face the future (metaphorical) – "equipping myself to walk strongly in the Pākehā world" and "I knew that one day I would wobble clear over the horizon." (Analysing and synthesising; inferring; forming and testing hypotheses)

After reading

- "Why is this text called 'Wobbling'?" Discuss further the extended metaphor. "What is or are the real wobble or wobbles? What is the metaphorical wobble?" Draw out the big idea of Witi finding his place in the world. Also discuss the importance of whakapapa (genealogical ties) in finding a place. Whakapapa is particularly relevant in the final section. (Analysing and synthesising; identifying the main idea)
- Discuss the effect of the extended metaphor as a way to describe the author's experiences. "What does it add to the text?" Consider how effective the text would be if the author just said up front: "I found growing up difficult." (Evaluating ideas and information)
- "What were the hardest years for Witi?" Look for evidence. Discuss the very first sentence and the first sentence of "Becoming a small frog". Then explore the first sentence of "Paikea, the whale rider" and the very final paragraph – especially how it compares with the rest of the text. Draw out the idea that, at this point (teenage years), Witi is coming to terms with his wobbling and no longer sees it as negative ("wobble clear over the horizon"). (Analysing and synthesising; inferring)
- Revisit things the students know about the author – especially his success. "Do you think Witi would use the metaphor of wobbling for his life now?" Elicit the idea that even successful people can have wobbly beginnings – and also that a people's ideas about themselves can differ greatly from others' ideas about them. (Making connections)
- You could also explore other features of Witi Ihimaera's writing (for example, his use of vivid verbs and a strong personal voice) for the students to use as models for their writing. (Analysing and synthesising)
- Review the learning goal and success criteria and reflect with the students on how well the learning goal has been achieved. For example, "How has identifying the extended metaphors helped you to understand how the author feels about his life? How will this help you when you read other texts?" Note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate their new learning?

The students could:

- brainstorm metaphors for their experiences of growing up (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)
- discuss the effect of metaphors in other texts (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)
- watch the film *Whale Rider*, which is based on his novel *The Whale Rider* (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)
- compare the ways that authors link ideas in different texts – for example, with an extended metaphor, as in this text, or with creating a pattern, as in “Treasure Deep” (same Journal). (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)
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