

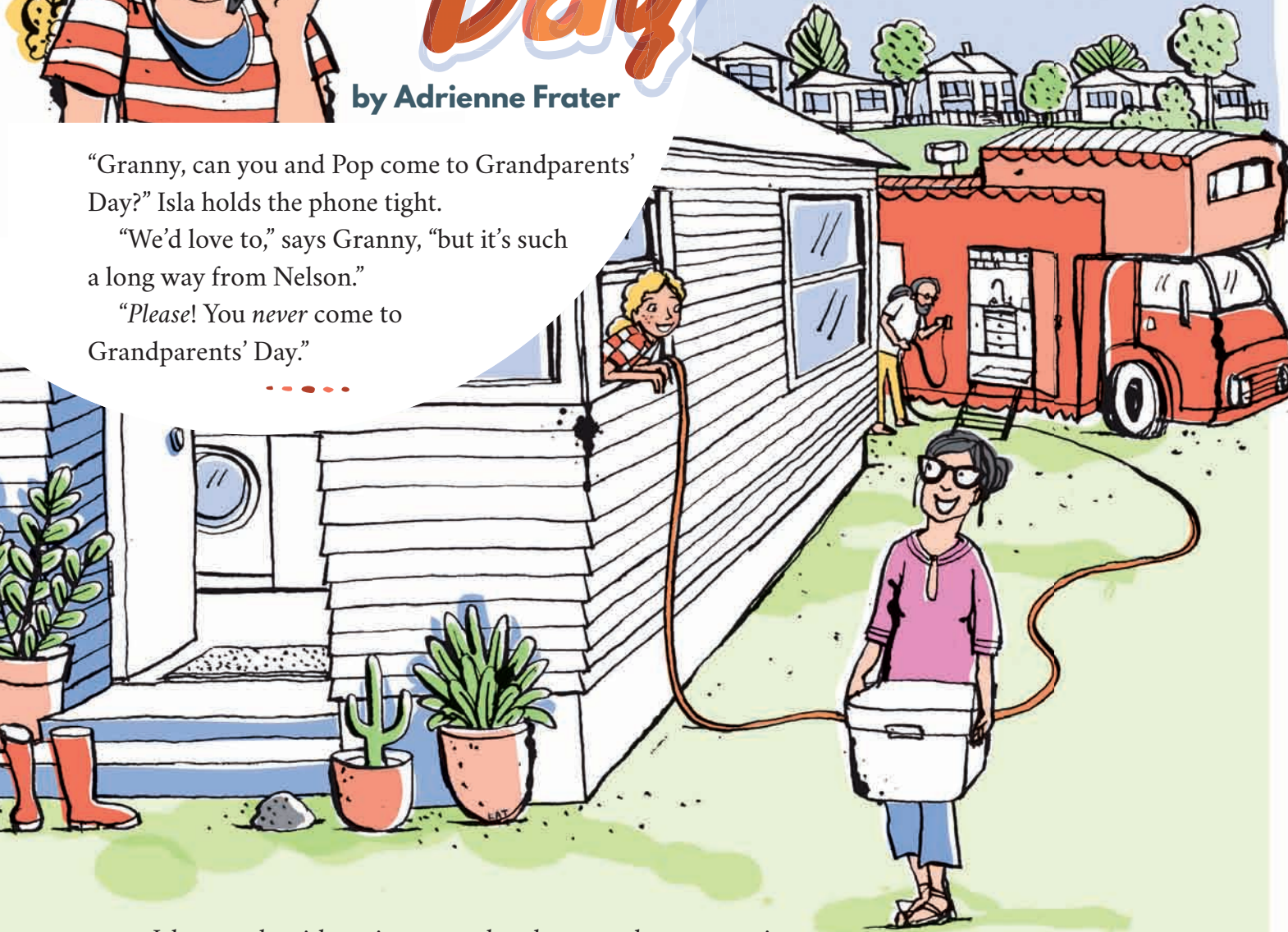
Grandparents' Day

by Adrienne Frater

"Granny, can you and Pop come to Grandparents' Day?" Isla holds the phone tight.

"We'd love to," says Granny, "but it's such a long way from Nelson."

"Please! You never come to Grandparents' Day."



Isla squeals with excitement when her grandparents arrive. They park their house truck on the front lawn and plug their power cable into the socket in the laundry. The house truck has everything they need.

The night before Grandparents' Day, Pop asks, "What time are you expecting us?"

Isla empties her backpack. "Here's your invitation. Sorry, I nearly forgot."

"Grandparents are to meet in the hall at ten," reads Granny. "After a special welcome and class visits, there will be a shared picnic on the sports field." Granny's eyes grow wide. After Isla has gone to bed, she searches the fridge and hunts through the pantry. "I guess I'll have to bake," she says with a shudder.

Once Isla's parents have left for work and Pop is walking Isla to school, Granny gets to work. She chops bacon, grates cheese, and cracks eggs. She mixes and stirs and puts the muffins in the oven.

"Smells OK," says Pop when he returns. "I'll watch them while you get ready."

Granny puts on her new skirt. It's purple with yellow polka dots. She mostly wears jeans, and the skirt feels strange. It's already hot, so she digs out her pink sunhat with the seashells that dangle around the brim.

Granny spots Pop outside feeding the rabbits. "What about my muffins?" she calls through the house truck window.

"Oops," says Pop, dropping the pellets and rushing inside.

"They *should* be OK," Granny says, scraping the burnt bits off the bottom. "But perhaps we could buy something at the bakery, just in case." Granny sighs her sixth sigh of the day. "It's already nine-thirty," she says. "And you can't go to Grandparents' Day dressed like that."





While Granny packs the muffins, Pop changes his shirt. "Ready?" Granny calls as she slams the back door.

"Not yet!" yells Pop. He looks at the power cable that leads from the house truck to the laundry. It needs to be unplugged so that they can shut the laundry window.

"Oops!" says Granny. "I'll get the house key." She lifts up the door mat. The key's not there. It's not in the pot plant or under the stone. It's not in the rabbit hutch or inside a gumboot. "We're going to be late," Granny wails, "and we've still got to stop at the bakery."

"Don't panic," says Pop. "I'll get a ladder."

At last Pop finds a ladder and levers the cord from the socket with a piece of wood he's found in the shed. Carefully, he pushes the window shut. "There. That will have to do," he says. He winds up the cord and stows it in the house truck.



"It's nine-fifty," Granny says as they back down the drive. "We're definitely going to be late."

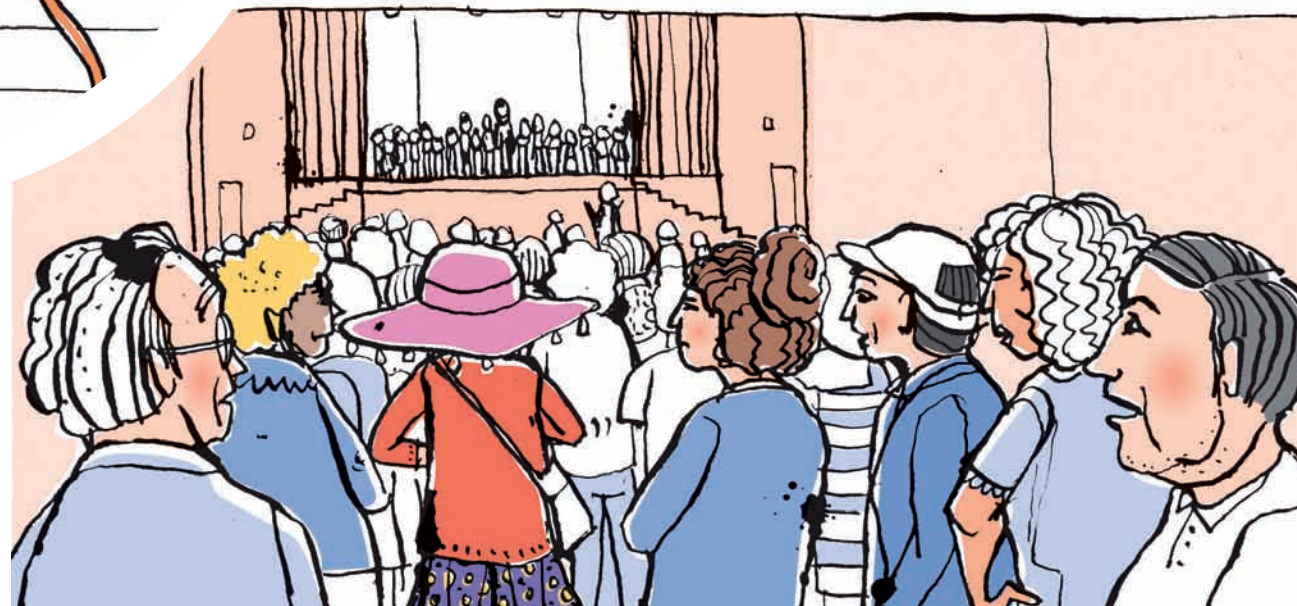
"Not that late," says Pop, patting Granny's knee. He stops the truck opposite a bakery. "Some blueberry muffins might be nice. Mind the traffic. The road's busy."

Granny eventually returns with some cheese muffins. "The blueberry were sold out," she says.



Parked cars line the streets around the school. There's no space for a house truck. Granny's face is as pink as her hat. "Keep calm," says Pop. "I'll drop you off and go park."

Granny hears singing coming from the hall. "I'll just sneak in," she decides, "and find two empty seats at the back." But she can't sneak in. She can't even see through the door. Grandparents spill out onto the netball court. Granny's in no mood to be polite. "Excuse me, excuse me, I've come a long way," she murmurs, elbowing her way through the crowd. She glimpses grandpas, grandmas, nanas, and poppas all sitting comfortably on chairs. Granny is sure Isla will be searching every face. She fans herself with her hat and tries to put on a smile.



After the singing, the principal welcomes the grandparents. "I wonder who's travelled the farthest?" she says.

Three hands go up – but Granny clicks her fingers and waves her big pink hat. "I'm from Nelson!" she yells.

"I was worried you wouldn't get here," says Isla as she leads Granny and Pop to her classroom.

"I wouldn't miss my first Grandparents' Day for the world!" says Granny.

Granny walks around the classroom. She admires the self-portraits and the dinosaur mural and the photographs from school camp. When she went to school, her classroom had a blackboard and a single world map.

Pop sits in a chair that's far too small. He has a dreamy look on his face. One moment, he's in his granddaughter's classroom – the next, he's back in his old classroom, sixty years ago. His wooden desk has a lift-up lid. He holds a pen that he has to dip in ink. There are forty children in his class, and not one of them dares to speak a word.



Isla skips beside her grandparents as they head for the sports field. Pop carries the chilly bin. Granny carries the rug.

"Let's sit here," says Isla.

They spread their rug near the flying fox. "Would you like a turn?" asks Pop. Isla waits in the queue, and Pop disappears. The cheese muffins – both the burnt ones and the not-burnt ones – look lonely on the picnic rug. Granny tries not to notice what everyone else is eating. Although it's a shared picnic, no one seems to be sharing.



"What are you up to?" Granny asks Pop. He has reappeared with a sausage in bread, a present for Granny that he hides behind his back.

"Yum," Isla yells. She jumps out of the queue and runs over to Pop. "I forgot to tell you there was a sausage sizzle," she says, grabbing the sausage. "Thanks, Pop." Isla gulps down Granny's sausage in four bites, then runs off to the monkey bars with her friends.

"Do you think we can go now?" Granny whispers. Sweat makes her face shine.

"If we're quick, we could go for a swim," says Pop.

"Great idea! We're off, sweetheart," Granny calls to Isla. "Thanks for inviting us." Then Granny sees Pop's face. "What now?" she asks.

Pop pats his pockets and smiles sheepishly. "Um," he says. "I seem to have lost something."

"Not the keys to the house truck?" Granny wails.

"It's a great day for a walk, don't you think?" says Pop.

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illustrations by Kat Chadwick

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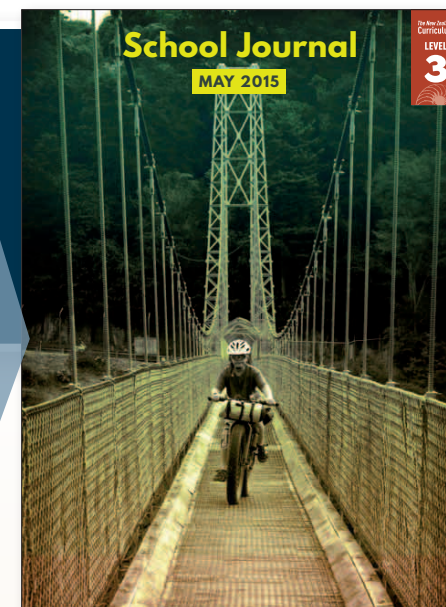
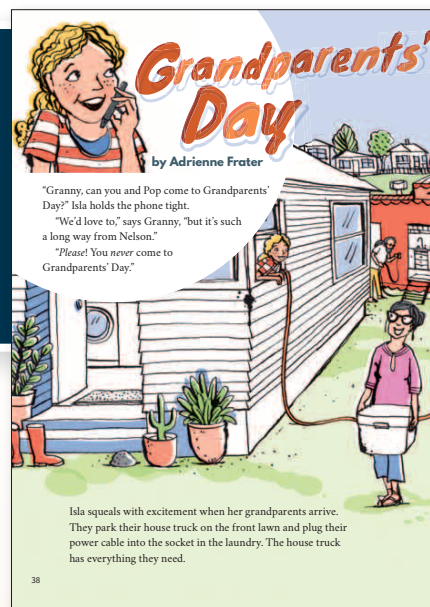
Published 2015 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz
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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 0 478 44663 0 (online)

Publishing services: Lift Education E tū
Series Editor: Susan Paris
Designer: Simon Waterfield
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



[New Zealand Government](http://www.govt.nz)



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 3, MAY 2015

Curriculum learning area	English
Reading year level	Year 5
Keywords	family, grandparents, humour, school