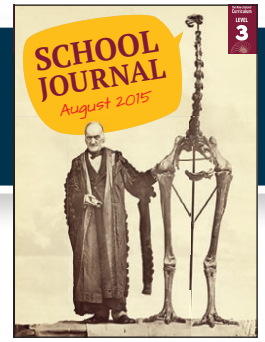


# Spirit of the Bird

by Ben Brown

School Journal  
Level 3, August 2015  
Year 6



## Overview

The bird of the title is the moa, and this fictional story is set in the time of the early Māori moa hunters. Little is known of this era, but the author conveys (often indirectly) the hardships of a subsistence lifestyle and the impact of human settlement on the moa.

Although students may not bring much prior knowledge to the story, the character of Pai, her love of drawing, and her desire to protect the huge birds will engage their interests.

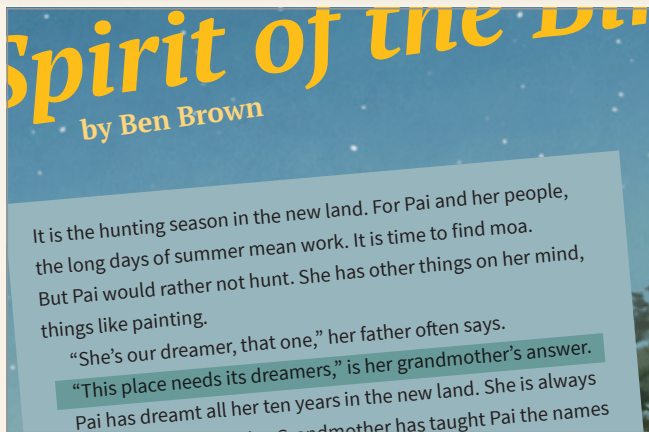
There are many ways to approach this story. How you do this should be based on the needs of your students. As well as their prior knowledge of early human life in New Zealand, take into account their ability to read a complex text in which much information needs to be inferred.

This narrative:

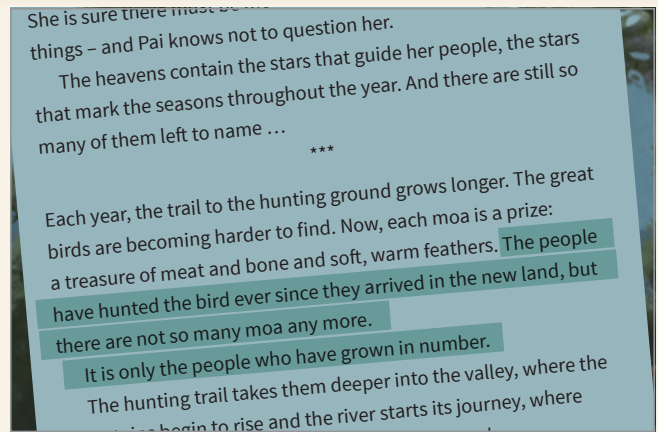
- provides opportunities for learning related to the big themes of competing for survival (human versus animal needs) and the uses of art, as well as the more personal themes of honesty and loyalty
- recounts a girl's discovery that could help her family – or hasten an extinction
- requires inference and forming hypotheses
- shares with the story "Thirst", in this Journal, the theme of the moral dilemma created when survival is at risk.

Texts related by theme "Richard Owen's Giant Mystery" SJ L3 Aug 2015 | "Thirst" SJ L3 Aug 2015

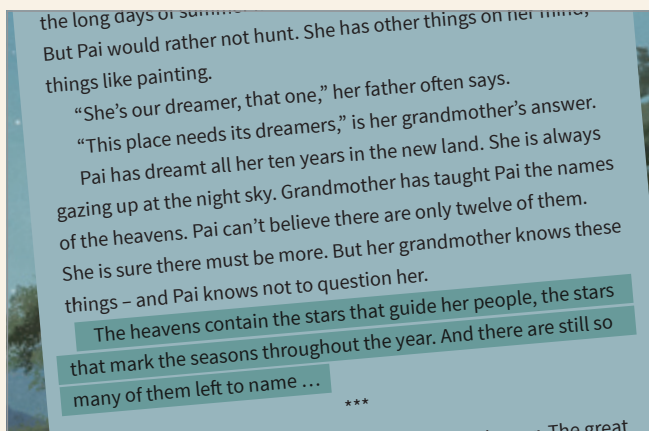
## Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard



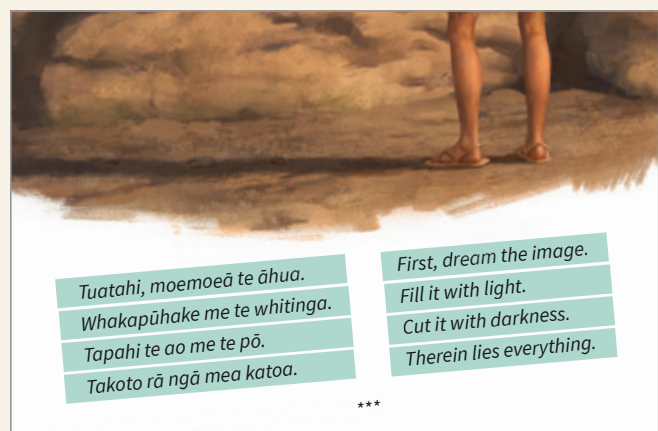
abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding



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



some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions



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

Reading standard: by the end of year 6

# Possible curriculum contexts

## ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

## ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

## Possible reading purposes

- To find out about the importance of moa to early Māori
- To think critically about the main characters' actions and motives
- To identify the challenges of life centuries ago in Aotearoa.

## Possible writing purposes

- To write a possible sequel to the story
- To research and describe the life of early Māori
- To research and compare life in early Aotearoa with life in another time.



# Text and language challenges

## VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “gazing”, “trail”, “flocks”, “clutches”, “homeland”, “hatchlings”, “wields”, “cloak”, “fragile”, “sustains”, “gathered”, “therein”, “tone”, “marvels”, “retraces”, “nibbled”, “scrapings”, “undergrowth”, “foraging”, “probe”, “foliage”, “cautiously”, “alert”, “thrill”, “creature”, “rare”, “pausing”, “nestled”, “cleft”
- The poetic language and sentence constructions, such as “a treasure”, “will never be”
- The simile, “as fresh and new as the rising mist”
- The heavens as used in this text to refer to the series of layered worlds that are part of the Māori world view and also to the various stars and constellations that signal the seasons of the year.

## Possible supporting strategies

Some of these suggestions may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.

- Some students, including English language learners, may find some vocabulary challenging. Support them to work out meanings by making connections between their home language and the context in which the words are used in the story.
- Some students may benefit from separate study of concepts and word families. For example, explore the differences between a cloak, a coat, and a jacket. Chart the words used to describe the stages of a bird's life cycle to clarify the difference between a hatchling and a chick. Make word maps or charts to record various ways to describe or name the bush. These word study activities help students build their vocabulary and develop greater precision with word usage in their oral and written language.
- [The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction](#), pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

## SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Some knowledge of early Māori arrival and settlement in Aotearoa (the “new land”) from Hawaiki (the “homeland”)
- Some knowledge that the giant moa became extinct from excessive hunting and/or burning of their habitats
- Knowledge that humans use different parts of animals for food and other purposes
- Understanding that families have traditions, such as the passing on of wisdom
- Understanding of the need to protect endangered species
- Understanding that moral decisions may be needed when survival is at stake
- Knowledge that the night sky played an important role in the past for such things as navigation, gardening, and food gathering.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Review what students know about the first settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand: *Who were they? Where did they come from? How did they get here? What did they eat?*
- Remind students to make connections as they read, for example, to what they know about why species can become endangered or extinct. Students from other countries could share their knowledge of their countries' extinct species and think about how their stories compare with that of the moa.
- Discuss the competing needs of humans and animals for habitats and food: this is a large and interesting topic.
- Prompt students to make connections between the choices facing Pai in this story and those facing Ryder in the story “Thirst”.
- Discuss the star constellations students are familiar with and how these were used for navigation and defining the seasons, for example, Matariki arriving in the night sky signalling the start of the Māori New Year and the time to plant kumara and taro. Discuss names used for the same constellations in other cultures and any myths associated with them.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Setting in a distant unspecified time in Aotearoa, long before European settlement
- Written in the present tense with references to the past
- References to another time and place (“the new land”, “their homeland”)
- The use of underlying abstract “big ideas” such as survival, extinction, the creative process
- Three short italicised passages that refer to the main character's creative process
- The use of te reo Māori in a poem alongside its translation
- Use of repetition: “the new land”; “Grandmother remembers when ... She remembers when...”; “She knows ... She knows ...”
- The use of incomplete sentences such as “Old nests, broken shells, lost feathers ... but no eggs”; “A movement, the brush of ferns across a large feathered body.”
- The overall tone, which is similar to that of a traditional story
- The ending, in which the reader becomes complicit in the girl's deception.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Spend some time reviewing strategies that can be used to help to “fill in the gaps” in a text that requires readers to make a lot of inferences. You could write the first sentence on the board and ask students to share their thoughts about the setting and characters the story will use. For each suggestion, identify the strategy used, for example, making connections to something a student already knows, asking and answering a question, or forming a hypothesis.
- Point out that the story is fiction and based on the little that is known about early life in Aotearoa. Students will need to draw on their knowledge of different kinds of fiction, their reading strategies, and any general knowledge to follow the events and ideas in the story.
- Remind them of fiction and poetry they have read where they have had to work out ideas for themselves. *Think about the strategies that have helped you in the past – how can you apply them here?*



# Instructional focus – Reading

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

## First reading

- Skim and scan the text with the students to gain an overall idea of the kind of story it will be and to identify the setting and characters. Ask the students to notice any features in the illustrations that could help them identify the time and place of the story.
- Share the purpose for reading with the students.
- Remind students that good readers work like detectives, searching for clues, asking themselves questions, and making connections between what they already know and what they are reading as they construct an understanding of setting, characters, actions, and themes.
- Read the first section together, then direct the students to work with a partner or in small groups. They can use a framework such as the one below to help them make inferences and ask questions. Discuss the simple example with them first. Explain that adding a question will help to focus their reading and activate their prior knowledge.

The text says	I know that	I infer that	My question is
in the new land	People sometimes move to a different country, and early Māori migrated here from Hawaiki.	The characters have come from another place, probably Hawaiki.	Is that where they came from? How long ago?

- Direct the students to continue reading, using supports such as peer discussion, a reading framework, or making notes as they go.

## If the students struggle with this text

- Provide a rich introduction to the text, including the setting, the likely time period, and the context. Include information about the importance of moa to the people.
- Read parts of the story aloud, as necessary, as students follow along in their own copies. Pause to explain, discuss, or clarify unfamiliar words or concepts. Students can work in pairs to reread sections, taking time to check they understand what is happening in the story.
- Provide relevant background information for those who have little prior knowledge of what New Zealand may have been like many centuries ago, in the time of moa and moa hunters. For example, share and discuss resources about early Māori and how they lived, including the use they made of moa.
- Provide a story map as a framework for students to help them identify the setting, the characters, the events, and the overall theme of the story. Pause during reading to check that they are able to make relevant connections and inferences, modelling examples if necessary.
- If students are unsure about the ending, reread the last sections with them, prompting them to notice Pai's words to the moa, her drawing, and the words she says to her father. *Why did she say it was a dream?*

## Subsequent readings

### The teacher

Check that the students have grasped the gist of the story by asking them to recount it or by probing for what they have learnt.

- When and where do you think the story might be set? How did you work that out? What clues and knowledge of your own did you use?*
- What do you learn about Pai and her family and how they live?*
- What happens in the story? What can you infer about the reasons for Pai's actions and the results of them?*

### The teacher

Prompt students to ask questions to support deeper thinking and connections.

- What questions do you have about Pai and the kind of person she is?*
- From the information about how her family use moa, what more can you infer about their way of life? What more do you want to know?*
- What questions do you have about Pai's role, her feelings, and her dreaming? How does dreaming help her make pictures?*

### The teacher

- Ask the students to suggest topics or themes from the story for further discussion.
- List their suggestions, then select one to use with the whole group. Possible topics or themes could include: why Grandmother said, "This place needs its dreamers"; how early Māori lived in Aotearoa; mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge and learning); survival; why the moa became extinct; or Pai's decision to lie to her father.
- Support students to draw on information and ideas within the text, from other texts and sources they have read or seen, and from their own knowledge and understanding as they formulate new knowledge and understanding of the chosen topic or theme.

### The students:

- infer that Pai and her family came to Aotearoa after making a long-distance ocean voyage from Hawaiki
- make connections within the text to link references to the scarcity of moa, the grandmother's memory of huge flocks driven with fire, and the family's need to hunt moa
- use the connections they make to place the story in the distant past, not long before moa became extinct.

### The students:

- ask questions and search for answers (in the text and from their own prior knowledge or connections) as they read
- use their own questioning to help make inferences and/or form hypotheses about the relationship between the family's need for food and tools and the demise of the moa
- locate, evaluate, and integrate information in the text to find answers, for example, to understand why the family needed to hunt moa; why Pai wanted to draw pictures; why Pai did not tell her father about the moa she had seen.

### The students:

- suggest topics, questions, or themes they would like to discuss or research
- engage in active discussion by using information from this and other related texts (such as "Thirst"), their own prior knowledge, and their opinions
- evaluate and integrate ideas and information as they share and deepen their knowledge and understanding of life for Māori in the time of the moa
- formulate opinions of how human needs could lead to the extinction of species such as moa
- synthesise ideas and information to form understandings and opinions of their own about the chosen topic.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- You listed the events in the story and noted the questions you had at each stage. That meant that when you reread, you could search for answers using information within the text, your own knowledge, and other sources. The notes you've made show me how you did this.*
- You read the Richard Owen story again. That was a good way to better understand the size of moa and why moa were so important to Pai's family.*

### METACOGNITION

- I noticed you asked some good questions in our group discussion. How does asking questions deepen our understanding of the events in a story?
- This story led to some great debates and discussions. By sharing and justifying your ideas, you were able to decide which ideas were likely to be correct and which could not be supported. What did you learn from this?



Reading standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Ideas: Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.)

## Text excerpts from “Spirit of the Bird”

It is the hunting season in the new land. For Pai and her people, the long days of summer mean work. It is time to find moa.

The people have hunted the bird ever since they arrived in the new land, but there are not so many moa any more.

It is only the people who have grown in number.

*Tuatahi, moemoeā te āhua.  
Whakapūhake me te whitinga.  
Tapahi te ao me te pō.  
Takoto rā ngā mea katoa.*

*First, dream the image.  
Fill it with light.  
Cut it with darkness.  
Therein lies everything.*

“Is that what you saw today, Pai?” asks her father.

“No,” Pai replies. “It was only a dream.”

## Examples of text characteristics

### IDEAS

*Writers sometimes look in unexpected places to find their ideas. A story can be set in any time and place: there are really no limits on ideas!*

### INFERRING MEANING

*Writers expect their readers to bring some information of their own to the text. They give clues and let the readers add their own thinking to make inferences.*

### POETIC LANGUAGE

*As well as providing information directly, writers can convey ideas by using poetry or poetic language. This creates atmosphere and allows the reader to understand the idea in a different way. For example, a poem can contain clues to the purpose or meaning of an artist’s work.*

### OPEN ENDING

*An open or ambiguous ending leaves readers to form their own opinion of what might happen next.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Prompt students to discuss where they get their ideas for writing.

- *What’s the most unusual writing idea you’ve had?*
- *Why do you usually write about people and places that you know a lot about?*
- *What challenges would a writer face in a story like “Spirit of the Bird”? How much would they need to invent?*

Encourage students to be adventurous as they select ideas to write about and the settings, characters, and events they could use to help express their ideas.

Model the way the writer has implied meaning. Use this or other examples from the text to unpack how an inference is made. You could adapt the framework on page 3, as shown here, to help students think about the inferences they expect readers will make, the information their readers already have, and the clues they will give readers.

I want readers to infer that	They already know that	My clues
The arrival of humans led to the extinction of moa.	Moa are extinct; there were no humans here before the early Māori; early Māori were moa hunters.	“But there are not so many moa any more.” “It is only the people who have grown in number.”

Prompt students to review their writing.

- *Think about the ideas you want to convey. Will you use straightforward descriptions, or can you use more poetic or evocative words and phrases?*
- *Can you “show” an idea by using a simile or metaphor?*
- *Choose a place where you’ve described or “told” an idea, then try different ways of writing it. Can you convey your meaning better by making changes in the vocabulary or the sentence structure?*
- *Share some examples with a partner and work together to craft effective ways of expressing your ideas.*
- *Ask another pair of writers to give you feedback on your variations.*

Choose a variety of different kinds of endings from published texts and from the writing of your students. Project them onto a whiteboard and read them aloud for study and discussion.

- *What do you notice about each ending? What feeling or questions does each one leave you with?*
- *Is the ending satisfying?*
- *Why do you think each writer chose to use the ending they did?*

Direct students to share their writing, focusing on the way they have written the ending.

- *What feeling or questions do you want your readers to have? Have you succeeded? How do you know?*

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You’ve taken the theme of dishonesty for a good cause from “Spirit of the Bird” and used it in a story about survival on a distant planet, thousands of years from now. It works well, and you’ve made the point that some themes and issues are timeless.*
- *You started with a very long story, then you revised it carefully. You removed some of the explanations and details you’d expect readers to know already. This has made your writing more interesting.*

### METACOGNITION

- How did reading “Spirit of the Bird” help you come up with your own ideas for writing? Some say that all good writers are good readers. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How important is planning to you when you prepare to write? What elements do you usually plan ahead? What elements do you prefer to leave until you’re into a full draft or revision? Why is that? Do you think your writing process or results would be improved if you did more (or less) planning? Tell me why you think that.

Writing standard: by the end of year 6

The Literacy Learning Progressions