

A Quilt for Kiri

by Don Long

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Overview

This sensitive narrative tells of the death of Kiri's grandmother far away in the Cook Islands. Grandma's gift of a quilt to Kiri sparks special memories for Kiri and her dad. These notes include background information about *tīvaevae* and aspects of Cook Islands culture. There is an audiotape of this text. *A Gift for Aunty Ngā* (Gold) is a sequel to this book.

Suggested purposes

This personal experience writing offers children opportunities to talk about their own memories and experiences of relatives who have died. It supports the comprehension strategies of identifying main ideas, inferring, and making connections.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the emotional nature of the text
- the themes of loss and treasured memories
- the links between the quilt, Grandma's song, and other memories about Grandma
- the cultural significance in the giving of the quilt (explored more fully in *A Gift for Aunty Ngā*)
- the shifts in time and place
- the inclusion of dialogue
- the song motif that runs through the text
- the descriptive language (the use of adjectives, a metaphor, and similes)
- the possessive apostrophes in "Kiri's" and "grandma's"
- the polysyllabic words that provide opportunities to practise "chunking" skills ("parcel", "pattern", "remembered").

Possible challenges

- the words "funeral", "hung", "months"
- the idea of objects or songs triggering memories.

Introducing the text

You may find it helpful to have read the background information so that you can feed it in if needed.

Be aware that some children may find the theme of this book upsetting.

Show the children the cover of the book. *What does the illustration tell you about the person in the photo?* Tell the children they are going to read a story about a girl called Kiri who receives a very special quilt after her grandma dies. Explain that Kiri's grandma was from a Pacific island and that the special name for a Pacific quilt is

“tīvaevae”. Encourage the children to share what they know about quilts or tīvaevae. If possible, have an example of a quilt to show the children, or you could show them the illustration on page 13. The illustration on the title page shows Kiri’s grandma working on the quilt that Kiri receives in the book.

During the reading

Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties.

Title page – *What are these women doing?* Encourage the children to share their knowledge of quilt-making, particularly the making of tīvaevae.

Pages 2 and 3 – Talk about the Pacific setting. *Are there people in your family that you know about but have never met?*

Page 4 – Check that the children know what a funeral is and that they understand that Grandma was Dad’s mother. Draw out the idea that Dad was sad for two reasons: that Grandma had died and that he wasn’t able to go the funeral. *Why wasn’t Dad able to go to the funeral?*

Page 5 – Talk about the strategies the children used to help them work out the unfamiliar words on this page, for example, reading on; remembering that the “w” before an “r” (as in “wrapped”) is silent; trying a soft “c” in “parcel” and “piece”; or chunking the word “cr-ink-ly”. *How did you check whether you were right?* You may need to reassure the children about the word “months” because it has an irregular “o” sound. Encourage the children to infer by asking them *What do you think is in the parcel?*

Pages 6 and 7 – Review the main ideas on these pages. *Why did they need to mend the quilt? What are they doing to mend it?* Have the children trace the pattern as Kiri does and have a go at “singing” the pattern of the flower to clarify the meaning of the simile.

Page 8 – *Why did they wash the quilt in the bath and not in the washing machine?*

Page 9 – Some children may say “hanged” for “hung”. Encourage the children to cross-check the visual features of the word and to think about what sounds right. *How is the quilt like a rainbow?*

Pages 10 to 13 – *What do pages 10 and 11 tell you about the quilt?* Check that the children understand that the flower on the quilt is a stylised version of the flower on page 11.

What’s Kiri thinking about on page 13? What’s made her think about this? The blue background on page 12 reinforces the idea that this is happening at night.

Pages 14 and 15 – Draw out the idea that Grandma’s death and the arrival of the quilt have sparked off memories and thoughts about Grandma. *Why did Mum give Kiri a hug? Who sent the quilt to Kiri?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, observing their use of expression, particularly for the dialogue. Note the strategies they use to manage the challenges in the text.

Draw on the background information in these notes and talk about the idea of *tīvaevae* being worked on together and being very special, treasured gifts. *Why do you think Grandma wanted Kiri to have the quilt?*

Look closely at the illustration of the quilt on page 9 or 13. Ask the children to think, pair, and share about why Kiri's grandma chose to decorate the quilt the way she did. (You could direct them to pages 2, 3, and 10, or you could see if they can identify these pages themselves.) Draw out the idea that the symbols on the quilt reflect Grandma's Pacific environment. Encourage the children to talk about other symbols they've seen on *tīvaevae*.

Focus on the author's use of descriptive language. Talk about the use of adjectives on page 5. *If there wasn't a picture, how would you know what the parcel looked like?* You could look at the use of similes (pages 7 and 9) to add interest and detail and (on page 7) to link to the idea of the song Grandma used to sing. Reread page 12 together and talk about how the author uses the metaphor of the moonlight "spread across her bed" to suggest that the moonlight is like a quilt.

Talk about the feelings of the characters in the story, for example, on pages 4, 10, and 12. *What could Kiri or Mum say to Dad on page 4?* Discuss the relationship between Kiri and her parents.

How could Kiri keep the memory of her grandma alive? See if the children refer back to the cover illustration. Encourage the children to share their memories of relatives who have died or who live far away. *What things help you to remember them?*

Focus on the use of dialogue on pages 6 to 8. *Why do you think the author has used dialogue here?* Draw out the idea that dialogue helps make the characters seem more real and gives more information to the reader in an interesting way. *What does the dialogue on these pages tell you about the quilt? What about on page 10?* Draw out the idea that pages 6 to 8 help to describe what the quilt looked like but that on page 10, Dad starts to explain why the quilt is important – its special links to Grandma. This idea is developed on pages 12 to 13, when Kiri thinks about Grandma, and again on page 14, where Dad remembers more about when Grandma was young.

Track the song motif that appears in the story. Ask the children to scan the text for the places that refer to songs (pages 3, 7, 12, 14, 15). Draw out the idea that songs help us to share feelings and cultures, to remember things, or to make us feel happy or sad. Ask the children to share their experiences of learning songs from family members.

Focus on the word "grandma's" on page 10. Explain that the apostrophe is there to show that the bed belonged to Grandma. Find and discuss other examples of possessive apostrophes in the text (on pages 2, 4, 10, and 14). Briefly review the idea that apostrophes are also used in contractions.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audiotape of the story.

Read *A Gift for Aunty Ngā* to the children.

Have the children reread *Keep in Touch* (Orange) and write a letter or postcard to a family member who lives far away.

Find out more about *tīvaevae*.

Have the children design a pattern for a quilt that includes pictures of things that are really special to them.

Ask the children to recall songs they loved when they were little or that remind them of special times. You could record them on audiotape, with each child doing a short introduction about why their song is special to them.

Have the children ask an older relative to teach them a song that they used to sing when they were young.

Background information

Tīvaevae are Pacific quilts and bedcovers put together in either appliqué or patchwork and involving long hours of sewing. The wives of missionaries taught the Cook Islands women the art of embroidery. Cook Islands women have made this craft their own, and today, tīvaevae is one of the great Pasifika art forms.

Tīvaevae are made up of distinctive patterns that are unique to each island and that usually reflect the identity of the designer or owner. The illustrator of *A Quilt for Kiri* and *A Gift for Aunty Ngā* has designed a new pattern for the tīvaevae in each of these books. In this book, Kiri and her mum have a pattern that features the pōhutukawa flower. Flowers play a very important part in the lives of Cook Islands people and often feature in tīvaevae patterns.

Making tīvaevae is a group effort by women working together in a “pange” or “ou” (as shown on page 4) until every woman in the group ends up with her own quilt.

The giving of the quilt to a loved and valued person is the final act for a completed tīvaevae. They are often presented on special occasions, such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies, and funerals. In the Cook Islands, people are sometimes wrapped in tīvaevae when they are buried.

A Gift for Aunty Ngā conveys the idea of “returning the favour”. Cook Islands people do not have an equivalent for “thank you”, although the word “meitaki” (good) may be used. Thanks are usually expressed through body language or an act of kindness. The idea of returning a favour or reciprocating hospitality is a way that Cook Islands and Pasifika people have of keeping their “connectedness” with family and friends. A kind act is always remembered and returned when the opportunity presents itself.