

Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū: The Pioneer Māori Battalion

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Overview

This article tells the story of Māori and the First World War and of the huge contribution made by the pioneer Māori Battalion. The topic will be unfamiliar for many students, but the themed content in the surrounding items will provide support. Students are encouraged to think about the war and the way it impacted on the lives of individuals as well as different groups. The article also provides insight into the alternative perspectives of some iwi at the time. These perspectives are explored through two supplementary text boxes.

The concluding section provides a wider perspective on what the war meant for Māori, touching on the reality of the years afterwards. This also relates to the mention in the article of the discrimination that existed in war, as evidenced by the British high command's attitude towards "native people fighting alongside Europeans".

To learn more about the First World War, go to: www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/first-world-war

Texts related by theme

“The Desert Kaupoi” SJSL L4 2013 | “King and Country” SJ L4 June 2014 | “Tūto‘atasi: The Struggle for Sāmoa’s Independence” SJ L4 May 2013

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

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

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

Pioneer battalion
After Gallipoli, soldiers from Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū joined with soldiers from the Otago Mounted Rifles Regiment. The two groups became the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion. The orders were that men in this battalion weren't to fight as **infantry**. Too many Māori had already been killed at Gallipoli. Along with the rest of the Expeditionary Force the men arrived in France in April 1916. They began to dig **trenches** and build roads behind the **frontline**. But it was still dangerous work, often done under fire. A few months later, the Pioneer Battalion became involved with the battle of the Somme and much later, Messines. Many more Māori soldiers were killed on the **Western Front**. Around the middle of 1917, the Pioneer Battalion was reorganised. The Otago men were replaced with around 470 soldiers, mostly from Niue and the Cook Islands. The battalion became known as the New Zealand (Māori) Pioneer Battalion.

Brave warriors
Seventeen Māori died on the slopes of Chunuk Bair. Eighty-nine more were wounded. After this battle, Māori soldiers became known as brave fighters. One Pakeha officer wrote that "As trench fighters you can't beat them." But like other troops at Gallipoli, the number of dead, wounded, and sick Māori soldiers grew. Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū was slowly **reduced to a shadow**. By the time the contingent finally left in December, only 134 of the original group of five hundred was left.

War's end
The day the war ended, **Armistice Day**, the Māori Pioneer Battalion had been heading towards Germany. Suddenly, high command changed its orders. "Native troops" wouldn't be allowed to **occupy Germany**. Instead, the soldiers would be sent back to New Zealand. The men were angry to be treated this way – but also pleased that they were going home. The Māori Pioneer Battalion was the only one to return to New Zealand as a complete group. The Māori soldiers were given a huge welcome, with parties and parades all over the country. The men knew they had "done their bit" – and done it well.

One soldier's story
The Māori Pioneer Battalion suffered many casualties. Each soldier was an individual with his own story. Hēnare Mōkena Kōhere (Ngāti Porou) was one of these men. He served in France as an officer with the battalion and was badly wounded during a night raid in the Battle of the Somme. He died two days later on 16 September 1916. Hēnare left behind three young children. He was thirty-six years old.

The Māori Pioneer Battalion on the Western Front, building a road just after the battle of Messines

Soldiers in the Māori Pioneer Battalion taking a break in the trenches, France, July 1918

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

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

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

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social Studies)

Level 3: Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws.

Level 3: Understand how early Polynesian and British migrants have continuing significance for tangata whenua.

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 learn about the important contribution made by Māori in the First World War
- To understand the reasons why Māori chose to join or not join the army in the First World War
- To understand the impact of war for individuals and communities
- To prompt thinking about abstract concepts such as nationhood and equality.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To give a personal response to one or more aspects of the article
- To research and find out more about the First World War.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Unfamiliar words and phrases, including “battalion”, “dominion”, “political decisions”, “attitude”, “trenches”, “new identity”, “war was declared”, “volunteered”, “Contingent”, “enlisted”, “loyalty”, “Rebels”, “high command”, “native people”, “supply depots”, “chaplain”, “military conscription”, “warrants”, “bayonet”, “Mounted Rifles Regiment”, “infantry”, “front line”, “Western Front”, “Pioneer Battalion”, “Armistice Day”, “endure”, “goodwill”, “gulf”
- The use of te reo Māori (usually translated), including a war cry, extracts from speeches, and haka
- The colloquial expressions: “weren’t bothered”, “joined up”, “do their bit”, “given more than enough”, “to see action”, “turned their backs”, “reduced to a shadow”
- The place names shown on the map on pages 2 and 3.

Possible supporting strategies

Spend time familiarising yourself with any unfamiliar Māori terms or expressions. Depending on the knowledge of your students, you may need to provide support for pronunciation and meanings.

Identify words and terms that may be unfamiliar to the students, in particular, the military and war-related terms. Take opportunities while talking about the First World War to introduce new terms. Support students to make connections between their meanings in this context and the meanings they already know. Create a word wall about the First World War, adding words during reading, viewing, or discussing events of the time.

If the colloquial expressions are new to students, work through the literal meanings to arrive at the colloquial meanings. Students whose first language is not English may be able to share similar expressions in this language. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Some knowledge about New Zealand’s participation in the First World War
- Knowledge that Māori fought in a separate battalion
- Knowledge of the major protagonists and locations of the war
- Some understanding of the impact of colonisation and the New Zealand wars on Māori
- Understanding of the concept of equality between races
- Understanding of how discrimination can be shown or experienced.

Possible supporting strategies

Build students’ prior knowledge carefully through exposure to a wide range of texts detailing the First World War and New Zealand’s involvement. They will also need support to understand the broader context of New Zealand’s history as a nation, including the conflict surrounding European settlement.

Give students who share a language other than English the opportunity to discuss the topic in this language and perhaps share their ideas with the class. You may also need to explore New Zealand history in more detail for students who don’t have this knowledge.

Provide visual and/or audio-visual material as prompts for exploring key concepts and vocabulary. You could give pairs of students images or video clips and ask them to prepare and present a description of their resource and their ideas about what it shows. The website Remembering WW1 – 100 Years On has many useful resources.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Factual report with explanations
- A range of verb forms, for example, “was”, “was beginning”, “had always been”, “had enlisted”
- Time and sequencing language, for example, “during the First World War”, “At the time”, “When war was declared on 5 August 1914”, “At first”
- Many passive verb forms – as is common in a formal explanation (for example, “was declared”, “was called”, “were replaced”, “wouldn’t be allowed”, “were given”, “were killed”, “were wounded”
- Text boxes organised around themes (“Rebels” and “Conscription and Māori”)
- Supportive sub-headings
- Use of photos and images from the relevant period
- Use of shorter rather than very long (or multi-clause) sentences.

Possible supporting strategies

Depending on the needs of your students, it may help to skim the text for an overall view of the content. Follow this by reading the text section by section over two or more sessions. A shared reading approach followed by paired or individual study will provide support as students encounter and digest new information.

Students will need to understand the signals of time and sequence, including the verb forms. Ask questions to check their understanding and provide support if necessary. You could co-construct a timeline of key events, discussing and explaining the signals as you do so. Create a chart of language signalling time and sequence.

If necessary, support students with understanding and identifying passive verb forms – their meaning, purpose, and structure. The text provides many models, so you could support students to use them, where appropriate, in their writing.

Students who will find the text challenging, may benefit from extensive previewing before reading. You could use the headings and perhaps some of the images as prompts for predicting what will be in the text. To make the task more manageable, you could assign sections to pairs and then share ideas as a whole group, ensuring you elicit and record key ideas and vocabulary.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Social Studies, level 3: Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws.)

(Social Studies, level 3: Understand how early Polynesian and British migrants have continuing significance for tangata whenua.)

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

Text excerpts from “Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū: The Pioneer Māori Battalion”

It’s often said that New Zealand “grew up” during the First World War. At the time, our country was a dominion, which meant that Britain still made some of our political decisions. Most Pākehā weren’t bothered by this. A few even thought of England as home. By 1918, this attitude was beginning to change. People were proud of what their small nation had done in the war. They were especially proud of their brave soldiers – soldiers who began using a new name for themselves in the trenches: Kiwis. It was a name that was to become part of our country’s new identity.

Students (what they might do)

The students **make connections** between the text and their prior knowledge to **infer** that the British government had some control over New Zealand that it doesn’t have now. They make further **connections** between information in the text and their knowledge of history to **visualise** how, over time, people started to see New Zealand as a separate country with its own identity. The students use their knowledge of metaphorical language to understand the meaning of “grew up” in this context. The students **make connections** between the text and their own experiences to understand that being “Kiwī” is a way of identifying as a New Zealander.

In no time at all, places like the East Coast and ... “... cause is their cause,” he said. “The British king is their king.” Āpirana Ngata, the MP for Eastern Māori, was also pleased. He believed Māori would become more equal with Pākehā if they fought beside them.

Rebels

Not all Māori felt the same way about the war. Some iwi, ... Fifty years earlier, the British government had declared war on

The students **ask questions** about the reasons Māori enlisted and locate answers. They **evaluate** Ngata’s hope for equality and **integrate** information in the text with what they know about more recent history to conclude that his hope was not fully realised. The students **ask questions** about the different attitudes of some Māori. They **locate** and **evaluate** the information in the text box and **integrate** it with earlier information to understand the different responses of iwi.

The returning soldiers had also seen the world. They ... meant better jobs. Many soldiers were now well-connected. They had made strong friendships on the battlefield, and when they got home, these helped them in work and business. Some friendships were with Pākehā. This helped to form a better understanding between the two races.

Mostly, the hopes of Māori hadn’t been realised.

The students **locate** information to **infer** that the war had some positive results for Māori. They **ask further questions** about the way the changes helped improve the status of Māori in New Zealand. They make links across the text and **integrate** further information about equality to conclude that although the war brought about many changes, it did not lead to real equality for Māori. Students **ask further questions** and are supported by the teacher as they **synthesise** information from the text and their own experiences.

METACOGNITION

- What reading strategies were the most useful as you read this article? Explain how you used one strategy.
- Tell me about where you lost track and had to reread to understand. Was it clearer the second time around? What did you notice yourself doing as you reread?

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

This extract assumes a lot of prior knowledge of New Zealand’s history. If necessary, use a shared reading approach and stop in appropriate places to give more explanation.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students as they infer meaning.

- Using what you know about history, why do you think some people said that New Zealand “grew up”?
- This may be a question that is best answered after reading the whole article, or after reading other texts about the First World War.

- If Pākehā weren’t bothered by Britain making decisions, how might Māori have felt? Why?
- Why did some Pākehā think of England as home? What knowledge helped you to infer that?

PROMPT the students to use what they know.

- Think about what you know about the First World War. How does this help you understand where the soldiers were fighting? Why might they have needed a name for themselves?

DIRECT the students to share their ideas with a partner.

- What does “identity” mean in this context? Is being a “kiwi” part of your identity?

PROMPT the students to ask questions as they read.

- What questions do you have about why some Māori leaders supported the war and others didn’t?
- What parts of the text helped answer your questions?
- What can you infer about their reasons?
- Do you think Ngata’s hope was realised?

MODEL how you integrate information across the text and use it for wider curriculum purposes.

- When I read about the Māori MPs supporting the war, I wondered why they would do that, given their history.
- When I read on, I learnt why not all Māori felt the same way. I wondered why it was different for these iwi. I concluded that the First World War raised hard decisions for Māori and not everyone felt the same way. My question now is, did fighting beside Pākehā make Māori more equal or not?

PROMPT the students to make connections across the text.

- What have you learnt about the way Māori were treated, in New Zealand and in Europe, during the First World War?
- What had changed for Māori as a result of joining the British war effort?
- What had not changed? Why not?
- What connections can you make with your own experiences or with more recent changes in present day New Zealand?
- What differences would Māori in 1914 see in New Zealand now?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I could see you were asking some focused questions as you discussed the text with your partner. Asking questions based on the information you have helps you gain a deeper understanding of a text.
- You made connections between this text and others you’d read about the First World War. I can see that this helped you understand the time and the setting.



Reading standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Social Studies, level 3: Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws.)

(Social Studies, level 3: Understand how early Polynesian and British migrants have continuing significance for tangata whenua.)

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

Text excerpts from “Te Hokowhitu-a-Tū: The Pioneer Māori Battalion”

But what about the 2500 Māori soldiers who fought during the First World War? How did the war change things for them? And why did they fight in the first place?

In February 1915, after training in Auckland, the soldiers were farewelled. “Haere e tama ma,” their whānau said. “Haere me te whakaaro ki te pupuri i te rongo toa a o tatou tupuna.” (“Farewell, young men. Go and uphold the name of our warrior ancestors. Fear God. And honour the King.”)

Then, in July 1915, the men were sent to Gallipoli. The British high command had always been uncomfortable with the idea of native people fighting alongside Europeans. So at first, the Māori soldiers were kept busy digging trenches and building supply depots.

Examples of text characteristics

SETTING THE SCENE

When writers want to explore one aspect of a broader topic, the introduction often sets the scene and shows what their focus will be.

USING QUESTIONS

When the author asks questions at the start of an article, they give the reader clues about what the text will be about. Questions help a reader to focus on the topic and make them curious to find answers.

USING TE REO MĀORI (OR OTHER LANGUAGES)

Writers who draw on their own language and culture when they write may use words and expressions that some readers will not understand. Adding a translation, or a glossary with translations is a good way for a writer to use their own language effectively, while at the same time supporting readers.

IMPLICATION

In order to get readers to infer, writers need to imply information. They give clues but don't state the obvious.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students clarify their writing choices.

- What aspect of our topic are you writing about?
- What do you assume your readers will already know?
- How will you help them to understand the context of your writing?

MODEL

- In this article, the title tells us what the writer's focus is, but he puts it into a broader context in the introduction. The last paragraph of the introduction focuses on his specific interest: the Māori soldiers who fought in the First World War.

PROMPT the students to consider their audience.

- How are you helping your audience to understand the topic?
- Consider using questions to start readers thinking. These questions also help you focus as you plan, research, and write.

EXPLAIN that writers use language in many different ways for many different purposes.

- A writer may choose to use words in a language some readers will not know, and he or she must decide how they will support their readers' understanding.
- Think critically about the words and quotations you choose. What is your purpose? How will they help your audience understand your message? How will you support readers who do not know the language?
- If you're using a translation or a glossary, check that your explanations relate exactly to the context – this may not be the same as a direct translation.

EXPLAIN the difference between explicit and implicit.

- Good authors expect their readers to work some things out for themselves. You've probably heard this explained as “show not tell”. In this extract, the writer expects the reader to infer why the British high command didn't like the idea of Māori fighting alongside Pākehā.

ASK QUESTIONS

- What do you want your readers to understand?
- How can you help them work something out for themselves? What clues can you give them?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You managed to cut a very big topic back to some specific examples that will help your readers to understand ...
- The way you've written your introduction helped me to see the big picture and the part of it that you'll be focusing on.
- The words of your tupuna are very powerful here. Even without your translation, I could feel the force of his words.

METACOGNITION

- What models helped you when you were writing? How did you use them?
- Show me where you made changes to imply meaning, rather than spell it out.



Writing standard: by the end of year 6



The Literacy Learning Progressions