

Richard Henry: Protector of the Kākāpō

by Lindy Kelly

From *School Journal*, Part 4, Number 3, 2006

Overview

This article celebrates a largely unknown but important New Zealander – Richard Henry, a man who led the way in protecting the kākāpō. As well as providing information, this text is likely to generate discussion around icons and heroes and to consider who we, as a society, value and why.

Suggested teaching purposes

- To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of inferring and **analysing and synthesising**.
- To engage the students in reading and thinking about how the author conveys her ideas to help the reader form an opinion about a character.

Suggested learning goal

I am learning to use the information in the report about Richard Henry to consider the sort of person he was and how the author shows this.

Success criteria

I will be successful when I have:

- identified Richard Henry's actions and choices
- said what these actions and choices suggest to me about Richard Henry
- given my opinion of what the author thinks of Richard Henry
- provided evidence to support my opinion.

Features of the text

What features of this text support the teaching purposes?

- The themes of care of the environment and commitment to a cause
- The picture painted of Richard Henry, a largely uncelebrated New Zealander, who was a solitary figure, ahead of his time, and founder of a legacy
- The engaging ways the author conveys the enormity of what Richard Henry did, for example:
 - the informal style, including the use of colloquial language (“hardly a welcoming place”, “What’s more”), contractions (“that’s where”, “wasn’t frightened”), and punctuation, such as ellipses, dashes, and brackets to help create a conversational tone
 - the vivid images, for example: the opening phrase “The rain-lashed shores of Dusky Sound ...” to begin the article, with an ellipsis to create expectation and atmosphere; “rugged, bush-clad mountains”; “so many loudly screeching kākāpō”, and the simile “the kākāpō would fall down like apples”
 - the dramatic language, for example, “In fact”, “For weeks at a time”, “Worse was to come”, “disaster struck”
 - the inclusion of the quote about him by Charlie Douglas (page 29) and the quote from him on page 31
- The supports in the text for the students’ attempts to infer the meanings of

words like “outback”, “backblocks”, “rugged”, and “bush-clad”

- The definitions included in the text for some topic-specific vocabulary, such as “mustelids”.

Readability

Noun frequency level: 12–14 years for guided reading

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

- Their knowledge of environmental issues and of New Zealand birds, especially the kākāpō
- Their knowledge of New Zealand’s colonial history and geography
- Their familiarity with the concepts of heroes.

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

- Particular words and concepts, including “What’s more”, “solitude”, “outback”, “conservationists”, “backblocks”, “taxidermy”, “rugged”, “bush-clad”, “groom”, “nineteenth century”, “mustelids”, “predators”, “exterminate”, “plight”, “natural history column”, “sanctuary”, “endangered”, “fiord”, “muzzles”, “Despite”, “wipe out”, “plummeted”, “disheartened”, “hermit”, “postmaster”, “hovered on the brink of extinction”, “crucial”, “national breeding programme”
- Students may need support with some aspects of the complex and varied syntax, for example, subordinate clauses – “When he was twenty-nine”; passive verb forms – “is still used”; present participles – “when living close to the wild birds”, “taking whatever work he could find”, “examining the contents”; relative clauses – “who taught”, “that is still used”.

Preparation for reading

Have the students independently read “Meet the Kākāpō”, SJ 3.3.06, to obtain some background information about kākāpō. In this Journal article, three students write to the Department of Conservation and meet some kākāpō chicks. The students will need to be prepared to discuss the current conservation issues affecting kākāpō and how the Department of Conservation staff protect and look after them.

A framework for the lesson

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

Before reading

- Discuss the responses to the “Meet the Kākāpō” article from the pre-reading task. “How many kākāpō were there when this article was written?” “What does the Department of Conservation do to help protect them?” Tell the students they will now be reading a text about early efforts to save the kākāpō. (Making connections)
- Draw attention to the old black-and-white portrait on page 28 and have the students read the title of the article. “What sort of text do you think this is and why?” Identify the time in which Richard Henry came to live in New Zealand (1870s) and discuss what life might have been like at that time. (Making connections)
- 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 the text and, individually or in pairs (depending on their abilities), fill in the first four columns of the graphic organiser below. Stop at the end of page 28 (and possibly also 29) to share ideas as a group and check that everyone is on track. The students can fill in the final column as a group after the reading. (Analysing and synthesising)
- Discuss ideas on what the author thinks of Richard Henry and link to her purpose in writing the text. “What evidence can you find for your ideas?” Prompt the students to look beyond the information that the author provides. They should also identify and explore the language she uses, for example, the opening image, dramatic phrasing, evocative descriptions, and quotes. (See “Features of the text”.) They can fill in the final column of the table on the basis of this evidence. (Analysing and synthesising; identifying the author’s purpose and point of view)
- Help with the vocabulary as necessary, encouraging the students to take advantage of the opportunities to infer word meanings. (Inferring)

Richard Henry’s actions	Richard Henry’s skills and jobs	What I think these things say about him	Any other interesting information	What the author wants me to think

After reading

- Have the students share and refine their graphic organisers as a group. Discuss Richard Henry’s contributions and brainstorm words to describe him. (Analysing and synthesising; evaluating ideas and information)
- “Who had heard of Richard Henry before reading this text? Why do you think you didn’t know about him? What do you think of him now?” Draw out the idea of the “unsung hero” and make connections with other similar figures. (Making connections; evaluating ideas and information)
- Discuss reasons why we (as a society) choose to respect and celebrate people – and whether these reasons change over time or differ depending on the culture. You could introduce names like Sir Edmund Hillary and Paris Hilton to stimulate discussion. “Are these people important/heroes? What makes a person a hero?” (Analysing and synthesising; evaluating ideas and information)
- Review the learning goal and success criteria and reflect with the students on how well the learning goal has been achieved. For example, “What sort of person was Richard Henry? What are some of the ways in which the author shows her opinion of Richard Henry?” 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:

- compare the character traits of Richard Henry with those of another

important historical figure (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)

- brainstorm important figures now and in the past and put them in order of significance, justifying their opinions (Analysing and synthesising; making connections)
- write a short biography about someone in their community whom they respect but who isn't necessarily recognised for their contributions. Discuss the language and structural features of a biography. The biographies could be presented to the whole class or in small groups (Making connections; links to writing)
- further research Richard Henry and the kākāpō – for example, to discover which “five of New Zealand’s flightless birds would now be extinct” if it weren’t for him (page 28) or to find out things the author hasn’t told readers. (Making connections)