



Overview

Māori brought the kurī or Polynesian dog with them when they migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand. This article looks at what we know about kurī, their origins, what they were used for, and why they died out. It incorporates traditional stories about the explorers Tāneatua and Īhenga and explains the importance of kurī to early Māori society. “Kurī” is a fascinating but challenging article at this year level, and you may wish to approach it in sections.

The author, Dr Priscilla Wehi, is a Māori scientist who presents a great role model for Māori students. Teachers will be able to make links to recent *Connected* stories that show how scientists work together and to articles such as “Kaitiaki of the Stream” and “Pöhā” in previous level 2 *School Journals*.

This article:

- reflects Māori identity, language, culture, and history
- explains the importance of kurī in traditional Māori culture and history
- provides opportunities to investigate the way of life of early Māori settlers – exploring, hunting and fishing, making cloaks
- includes some information about how the author is working with other scientists to find out about kurī.

A PDF of the text and an audio version as an MP3 file are available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme “Counting Kākahi” *Why Is That?* Connected L3, 2014 | “What Alice Saw” *Spy* Connected L2, 2013 | “The Bat That Walks on the Ground” SJ L2 April 2013 | “The Hidden Midden” SJ 2.3.10

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

Two Explorers and Their Kurī

Tāneatua was a well-known explorer. Stories passed down by Māori tell us that he was in charge of kurī on *Mataatua*, the waka that landed at Whakatāne. When Tāneatua arrived in Aotearoa, he began exploring the forests and hills of the Urewera. He took his kurī with him.

Tāneatua and his dogs are famous in the Urewera and eastern Bay of Plenty. There is a small town named after him, and there are many place names that tell the story of his journey. The stories say that Tāneatua lost some of his dogs. When he started off, he left one of his kurī behind – people say the dog is still there, in the shape of a hill called Ōtarahioi. (The hill is also known as Te Kurī-a-Tāneatua.)

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students’ prior knowledge

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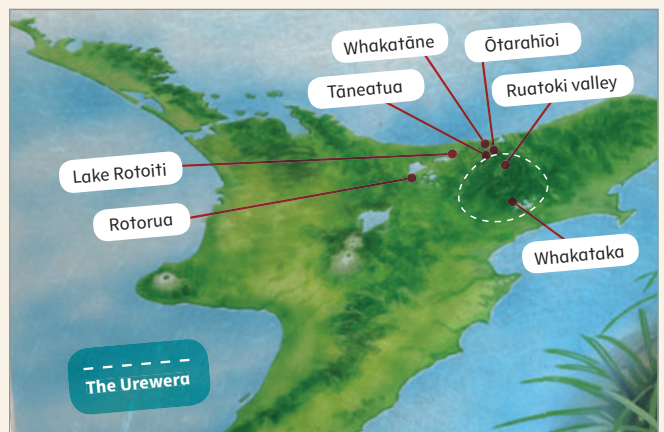


some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information

Tāneatua left another of his dogs in the Ruatoki valley. That dog was called Ōkiwa. The very cold, misty wind that blows down the valley is called “the breath of Ōkiwa”. Another of his dogs died, so he threw its body off a cliff. The place where this happened is called Whakataka (which means “to throw off”).

Īhenga was another great explorer who always had a dog by his side. He was one of the first people to live in the Rotorua district. Īhenga found Te Rotoiti-kite-a-Īhenga (the small lake found by Īhenga) when his dog Pōtakatawhiti ran ahead to look for food. It came back with a wet coat and some fish in its mouth, so Īhenga knew that there was a lake nearby.

some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses



other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 2 – Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people's customs, traditions, and values.

SCIENCE (Living World)

Level 2 – Evolution: Explain how we know that some living things from the past are now extinct.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Possible reading purposes

- To learn about kūrī – how they came to Aotearoa New Zealand and what happened to them
- To learn how scientists work to determine the history of a species.

Possible writing purposes

- To suggest and write about possible reasons why kūrī disappeared
- To research and tell another traditional story that explains one or more place names
- To write a fictional story, set in the time when kūrī were living in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “Polynesians”, “waka”, “related”, “ancestors”, “starving”, “companions”, “passed down”, “explorers”, “misty”, “cliff”, “jaws”, “shaved”, “cloaks or kahukūrī”, “hand-to-hand fighting”, “hapū”, “handed down”, “generations”, “chief negotiator”, “Treaty settlement”, “dying out”, “freshwater fish”, “wisely”, “flightless”
- The proper nouns of Māori people, places, dogs, and canoes, including “Tāneatua”, “Mataatua”, “Whakatāne”, “Urewera”, “Ōtarahioi”, “Ōkiwa”, “Ihenga”, “Ruatāhuna”, “Te Rotoiti-kite-a-Ihenga”, “Pōtakatawhiti”, “Ruatoiki”
- Other place names: “Pacific Ocean”, “Hawaii”, “Cook Islands”, “Rarotonga”, “east Asia”, “Tahiti”, “Rapanui”, “Sāmoa”
- The use of “kūrī”, which refers to the early Polynesian dog but is also the contemporary te reo Māori word for dogs in general.

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 and knowledge.
- Familiarise yourself with any of the Māori vocabulary and names that are new to you. You could use the knowledge of your students, other staff, or experts in your community to provide accurate pronunciation and support for meaning. Have bilingual dictionaries on hand to confirm attempts to solve meanings.
 - Use the [audio version](#) to support correct pronunciation.
 - Before reading, identify words that may be unfamiliar to your students. Provide opportunities to clarify their meanings while exploring the knowledge required to read the text. You may need to explain some of the more challenging vocabulary that is related to kūrī and their uses.
 - Note the terms that reflect the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices, including “handed down” and “passed on”.
 - *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

- Knowledge that Māori sailed to Aotearoa New Zealand in double-hulled Polynesian waka many centuries ago and brought plants such as taro and kūmara and animals such as kiore and kūrī with them
- Some knowledge of kūrī, possibly from museums, cloaks, or traditional stories
- An understanding that the names of places often relate to people (including explorers) and events from long ago
- Familiarity with the features and qualities of dogs
- Understanding that dogs were sometimes eaten
- Some knowledge of the geography of areas mentioned, including the Urewera and eastern Bay of Plenty
- Some knowledge of Captain Cook
- Awareness of modern-day Treaty settlements.

Possible supporting strategies

- Have students share any prior knowledge of how the earliest settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand arrived and survived. Include discussion of what they might have brought with them, including kūrī.
- Support them to make connections to the way places were named and invite students to share their knowledge about place names.
- Have students share their experiences of dogs as pets (companions) and hunters. Some students may need to adjust to the idea that dogs were eaten: prompt them to consider why this may have been necessary.
- Discuss the possible reasons for the extinction of birds and animals that were once common, including moa and kūrī.
- Support students to share their knowledge of the work of scientists, including the way they can find out about things that happened long ago.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- A structure that follows the history of kūrī chronologically – and then covers current research into kūrī
- Inclusion of traditional stories of Tāneatua and Ihenga
- Inclusion of explanations and hypotheses
- Use of headings, many framed as questions
- The glossary
- The use of illustrations that include maps, photographs, and a nineteenth century painting
- The use of time and causal connectives in an explanation
- The use of modality to express the likelihood of something being true, for example, “One reason could be”, “It's also possible”, “there were probably”.

Possible supporting strategies

- Before reading, allow students to share their knowledge of the purpose and structure of an explanation.
- Review the use of features such as headings and illustrations to support meaning. In particular, discuss the use of questions to help readers know what each section will explain.
- Discuss the maps, what they show, and how to use them in conjunction with the text.
- If necessary, help students to follow the kūrī chronology by making a timeline and marking it as they read. This could also be developed as a paired [split information gap activity](#) after reading.
- Use a shared reading approach and/or jigsaw reading to scaffold the students into reading, as well as for previewing the topic, vocabulary, and structure before reading. (See First reading on page 3 of these notes for more on jigsaw reading.)



Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Level 2 – Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

Science (Living World, Level 1 and 2 – Evolution: Explain how we know that some living things from the past are now extinct.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

First reading

- Make decisions about how to approach the text, for example, by reading it in one, two, or three separate sessions.
- Provide a brief introduction to the reading and share the purpose for reading. Read aloud the first page of “Kuri”, then ask questions to support students to make connections with the text. *Had you heard of kuri or Māori dogs before? What do you know about them? Why do you think the early Polynesians brought kuri when they sailed across the Pacific Ocean? What kinds of things would you take if you were travelling to a distant land?*
- To make connections with the text, recent migrants might share how their family made decisions about what they brought with them to New Zealand.
- Skim and scan the rest of the text with the students, pointing out the supportive features, including the headings, illustrations, maps, and the glossary.
- Work through the rest of the text together, supporting students with vocabulary and names where necessary. For each section, discuss the heading before and after reading the section to check that the students follow the main ideas.
- Alternatively, you could use a jigsaw reading approach. Direct students to work in pairs and assign one section to each pair. Have them read their section, discuss it with their partner, and find two or three key facts that will help others know what the section is about. Write the headings on the whiteboard and then ask each group to write up their key facts or share them orally as they report back.

If the students struggle with this text

- Refer to the “Text and language challenges” section on page 2, and identify relevant supporting strategies that your students may need.
- Spend more time setting the scene and helping students to activate or build prior knowledge, section by section. Use a shared reading approach if necessary, and spend time supporting the students to understand the main ideas in each section.
- Prompt the students to reread the headings to support their understanding of each section.
- Remind students to stop and think about what they already know, for example: *What do you know about the way dogs help people? What kinds of dog do the ones in the illustrations remind you of? What would a cloak made of their hair feel like?*
- Draw up a chart with headings for each section and have the students make notes under each one to record important and interesting facts.

Subsequent readings

The teacher

Direct the students to reread the first two pages and ask any questions they still have about how kuri came to New Zealand. Model one or two questions, for example: *I wonder how scientists could tell that the dogs were all related?* Write the students’ questions on a chart and prompt them to check the chart as they read, adding further questions and discussing any answers as they find them. Prompt students to make connections as they read.

- *What connections can you make between this text and the ways animals’ hair, fur, and skins are used in other cultures? What does this add to your understanding of the importance of kuri to early Māori?*

The teacher

Remind students to draw on what they already know about how scientists work and apply this to help understand the text. The questions suggested here will require sophisticated thinking: work through one or two with the students, prompting them to think critically and, where possible, to locate evidence in the text to support their answers, opinions, and inferences. You may need to explore the differences between proven facts (scientific evidence) and opinions or hypotheses (so far not proven). If you have students who have recently arrived from other countries, allow them to use their first languages to discuss these ideas before sharing them in English.

- *Work with a partner to list all the reasons given for why kuri might have disappeared. Which of those reasons have scientists been studying? How?*
- *What facts have they found out? What other opinions do they have? What do you think might have happened? Why do you think that?*
- *What clues help you make inferences about the change in the kuri diet?*
- *Why would finding out about these dogs help scientists understand more about how Māori society has changed over time?*
- *What would a present-day “midden” tell future scientists about what we eat?*

You could provide speaking frames to help English language learners express their ideas, particularly by supporting their use of connectives and modals, for example, “I think today’s middens would tell scientists that we eat ... because ...”

The students:

- draw on what they already know about the early migrations to formulate questions, such as “Did they bring other animals too?”
- use their questions to focus as they read on and search for possible answers
- continue to add questions to the chart
- discuss unanswered questions and how they might be answered
- use information in the text and their understanding of how to treat dogs to infer that Ihenga loved and cared for his kuri
- make connections between information in the text and what they already know about how animal furs and skins are used
- think critically about the multiple reasons why kuri were a sensible choice for early Māori to bring to New Zealand.

The students:

- reread and locate reasons given for the disappearance of kuri
- use information in the text, their own reasoning, and their understanding of the difference between “facts” and “opinions” to decide which reasons are supported by science and which are not
- offer opinions of their own and justify them with facts or reasonable inferences using appropriate modality
- think critically about why there were changes in the diet of kuri to understand why scientists study what they ate
- share their opinions about today’s versions of middens and what they would say about our diet.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *Your memory of a documentary about Alaska helped you understand how important dogs have been in different cultures. Making connections to what we’ve seen or read before helps us to understand new ideas or information.*
- *You’ve given a lot of thought to forming opinions about why kuri disappeared. It’s a good idea to use various sources of information the way you did.*

METACOGNITION

- This was a challenging text, and you had to use all your skills to read it. Turn to a partner and share places where you had to pause and use a strategy to understand what you were reading. What strategy did you use? How did it help?
- Readers and scientists use similar strategies. They put together clues to find out more about something. Tell me about a place in this text where you put together clues to learn more about kuri.



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Level 2 – Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people’s customs, traditions, and values.)

Science (Living World, Level 1 and 2 – Evolution: Explain how we know that some living things from the past are now extinct.)

English (Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.)

Text excerpts from “Kuri”

Tāneatua and his dogs are famous in the Urewera and eastern Bay of Plenty. There is a town named after him, and there are many place names that tell the story of his journey.

Īhenga was another great explorer who always had a dog by his side [...] It came back with a wet coat and some fish in its mouth, so Īhenga knew that there was a lake nearby.

Some middens are many hundreds of years old. Other middens are newer – only two or three hundred years old. The bones found in the older middens were mostly the bones from young dogs. In the newer middens, the bones were mostly of adult dogs. This tells us that by the time Pākehā arrived, there may not have been many young dogs left.

When kuri ate lots of fish or lots of plants, it changed the chemicals in their hair and bones.

Examples of text characteristics

USING STORIES

Writers who use stories that have been passed down are giving readers another way of learning about the past. By writing them down, writers keep the stories alive and help readers understand things about the present, such as how places were named.

IMPLICATION

The writer needs to give clues to help the reader infer information. The writer expects the reader to make connections between the clues.

COMPLEX SENTENCES

A complex sentence is formed by adding subordinate clauses to a simple sentence. The subordinate clauses often add information and are a good way of adding detail.

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Ask questions to help the students plan their writing.

- How much do you already know about your topic?
- Have you made a plan for writing and noted all the pieces of information you’ll need to find?
- Where will you find the facts you need?
- What other information can you use?

Prompt students to think about the sources they could use.

- What kinds of stories have you heard in your family, whānau, or wider community that could provide interest or evidence for your topic?
- Could you ask your family if they know any stories about it?

Model an example.

- My family moved to Auckland when I was four. I remember being told about how the harbour bridge was built. Dad said he walked across it the day it was opened. If I write a story about Auckland traffic, this would be a good story to show that it was once a very long trip from the city to the other side of the harbour.

English language learners would benefit from telling their story orally before they write. They could draw a storyboard, share the story orally, and then add text. Some students may benefit from using sentence scaffolds.

Model making an inference.

- The writer compares the bones in a very old midden with the bones in a newer one. I had to use what I already knew about when Pākehā arrived to understand why she says there were few young dogs left.
- Have a look at your writing and identify if there are places where you can give clues but still allow your readers to work it out for themselves.

Direct the students to examine their writing.

- How can you add detail to your writing?
- With a partner, discuss the extract and how the words between the commas add more detail to the sentence.
- Now take a look at your own writing. How could you add details to a simple sentence to make it more interesting or informative?
- Read the new sentence aloud to check that it makes sense and sounds right.

English language learners may not hear if something “sounds right”. Instead, they may compare their writing against model texts, use writing checklists, or have a partner edit their work.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- Your plan was very complicated at first, but when you realised you didn’t have as much information as it required, you simplified the plan. That made writing your article more manageable.
- The story about how your marae was named tells your readers how old it is. This is a good way to give information and honour your tipuna at the same time.

METACOGNITION

- What did you learn about planning and finding information? How would you go about planning an article next time?
- How did you make sure your readers could follow your explanations? Tell me about the way you’ve used peer feedback to check that your ideas make sense.
- You’ve made a great list of topics to write about. How will you decide which ones to use?

Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions