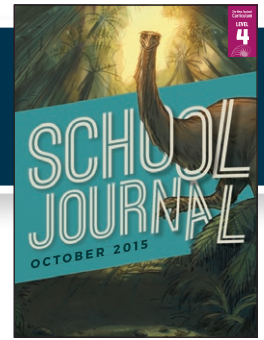


# Family Photographs

by Alison Wong

School Journal  
Level 4, October 2015  
Year 7



## Overview

In this prose poem, the poet reflects on two old photographs that show her father at different ages. In one, her father was four years old and was living in New Zealand with his family. By the time of the second photo, the family had gone back to China and there are two more children. Both photos show his siblings, and the clothes they wear reflect the styles of the two very different countries.

In telling the stories behind the photos, the writer reveals something of the way New Zealand's early Chinese families were treated. This includes the impact of the infamous poll tax.

Students from other countries may relate closely to the poem's theme of being separated from extended family. Take a moment to set some expectations with all students so discussions will be conducted with sensitivity.

This poem:

- has themes of family connections and the experience of being an immigrant
- requires students to work out the movements of the family and the possible reasons for the differences in the photographs
- requires students to infer the impact of being left behind
- uses photographs as starting points for storytelling
- provides opportunities to infer meaning within poetic, metaphorical language.

A PDF of the text is available at [www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz](http://www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz)

Texts related by theme "Bok Choy" SJ L3 June 2015 | "Wining's Wairau" SJ L3 Nov 2014

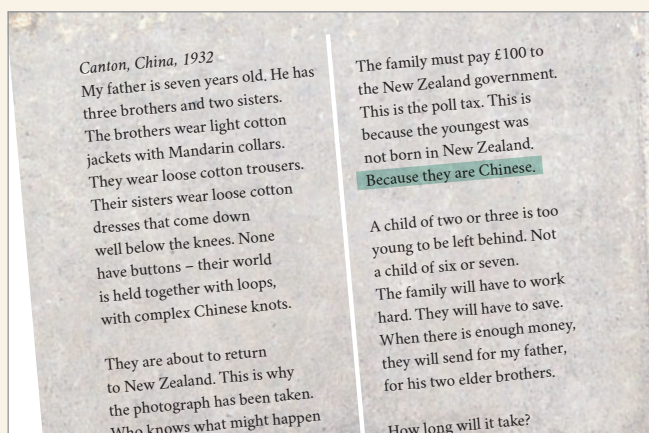
## Text characteristics from the year 7 reading standard



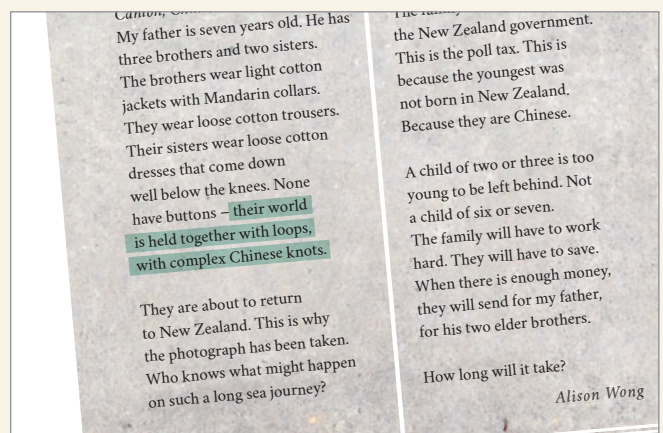
elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas



complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments



adverbial clauses or connectives that require students to make links across the whole text



words and phrases with multiple meanings that require students to know and use effective word-solving strategies to retain their focus on meaning

# Possible curriculum contexts

## SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 4 – Understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities.

## ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.

## ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

## Possible reading purposes

- To understand some important experiences of the writer's family and New Zealand's history, based on two old photographs
- To identify and discuss the use and impact of poetic language features
- To synthesise information about the lives of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand by using this poem and the story "Bok Choy" and to draw your own conclusions about their experiences.

## Possible writing purposes

- To write about the children in the photographs, using your imagination and knowledge of history
- To use photographs to write stories or poems about your own family's history
- To research and write a report about the poll tax and its impact on Chinese families in the late nineteenth century
- To recount a family story.



# Text and language challenges

## VOCABULARY

- Possible unfamiliar words or phrases, including "bodices", "handkerchief", "lace-ups", "siblings", "Mandarin collars", "Chinese knots", "£100", "poll tax".

## 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.

- Identify words that may be unfamiliar to your students and discuss these when introducing the poem and photographs prior to reading.
- *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 the treatment of early Chinese settlers to New Zealand
- Some knowledge or understanding of the reasons why people immigrate to New Zealand and of the difficulties they may face
- Awareness of racial discrimination (in its official and unofficial forms)
- Some understanding of taxes and their purposes
- Some knowledge of how clothing styles differ around the world, specifically, knowledge of traditional Chinese dress.

## Possible supporting strategies

- The poem may be best read within relevant contexts such as New Zealand history, family stories, immigration, or discrimination.
- Find and display factual information about the history of Chinese immigration to New Zealand and, in particular, the poll tax.
- Students could research the reasons for the poll tax and discuss its effects. Useful sources include [nzhistory.net.nz](#) and [teara.govt.nz](#)
- Students who have comparable experiences (of immigration or discrimination) within their families may wish to share these with the group.
- Images of traditional dress from China and other countries in the 1920s and 1930s will support students to identify differences in the photographs. Find images of the loop-and-knot fastenings used in Chinese clothing to support students to understand the metaphor at the end of the fourth stanza.
- Help students who are recent arrivals from other countries to make connections to this text by inviting them to discuss traditional clothing from their home cultures.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Unrhymed poem in seven stanzas plus a separate final line
- The use of a prose style in a poetic form
- The importance of the two images to the meaning
- Varied sentence lengths, including the long complex sentence in the first stanza
- Poetic use of language, for example, "captured/in that one long moment when children/are not allowed to be children but/ forever still and emptied of play"
- The use of repetition: of her father's age, the children's clothing, of preparing to return
- Use of the metaphor to describe the children's world "held together with loops,/ with complex Chinese knots."
- The use of rhetorical questions: "Who knows what might happen ...?"; "How long will it take?"
- The use of italics: "I say *return*", "He never *returned*."
- The use of the present tense to describe events in two past times as well as in the present
- The use of the future tense to describe events that were still to come at the time of the photographs, but which now are also in the past.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Students who expect poems to rhyme or have a rhythm may be challenged by a poem that reads more like prose. Explain that the writer probably chose this form because it supports evocative and poetic language in ways that would not sound the same in a straight narrative. Students can experiment with reading the poem aloud to emphasise the emotional impact of the factual descriptions.
- Support the metaphor by exploring how we could describe our world or life, for example, "I feel my life is rolling down a grassy hill in the sunshine". Consider conducting a mini-lesson on metaphors, similes, and other poetic devices.
- If students become confused by the use of tenses in different time periods, create a timeline to show the present and the dates in the past. Show how, in 1932, the family is described in the present tense and then in the future when the writer describes what the family's future will be like. This change in tense may be particularly challenging for some English language learners. You may wish to highlight instances where the author uses present and future tense and allow time for class discussion.



# Instructional focus – Reading

**Social Sciences** (Level 4 – Understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities.)

**English** (Level 4 – Language features: Show an increasing understanding of how language features are used for effect within and across texts.)

## First reading

- If possible, project the text (including the photographs) onto a screen as the students read the poem by themselves or as you read it aloud. The approach you choose will depend on your knowledge of your students' reading expertise.
- Ask the students to skim and scan the poem, noticing how it is both similar to and different from poems they are familiar with.
- Discuss the purpose of the reading and then direct the students to work with a partner. Have them read the poem together, pausing at the end of each stanza to check their understanding. Ask questions to check their first impressions. *What overall feeling or impression are you left with? What message do you think Alison Wong wanted to share with her readers?*

## If the students struggle with this text

- Support them to pause and summarise or clarify at the end of each stanza. *What do we learn in each stanza? What time period does each stanza tell us about?*
- If necessary, create a timeline with the students, going backwards from the present (starting with Alison Wong looking at two old photographs) to the most distant date mentioned (1896). Use the timeline to help students match up the photos, dates, and events.

## Subsequent readings

### The teacher

Direct the students to reread the first stanza.

- *What does she mean by “captured/in that one long moment”?*
- *Using what you know about sentences, what is the subject of the verb “captured”? (Who or what is captured?)*
- *What has captured them?*
- *What does she mean by the last line?*
- *What is the impact of describing the children in this way?*

### The teacher

Prompt the students to consider the metaphor at the end of the fourth stanza.

- *In the descriptions of clothes here and in stanza two, the writer points out the different ways the children dressed in New Zealand and in China.*
- *Think about and discuss with a partner why she uses the fastening as a metaphor for “their world”.*
- *What was “their world”? In what way was it “complex”?*

### The teacher

Point out that the tax had to be paid for every person in the family, even if only one (the youngest) was not born in New Zealand.

Ask questions as the students work in pairs to discuss the situation the family was in.

- *Why do you think the family left New Zealand then wanted to come back again?*
- *How did they decide to solve the tax problem?*
- *Do you think her father and his brothers eventually came back to New Zealand? Is there any evidence in the poem that would support this?*
- *What do you think the writer's purpose was in writing this poem? What message does she want you to understand?*

### The students:

- reread and discuss the first stanza
- use their knowledge of sentence structure to identify the clauses that explain how you can tell the photographs are old
- make connections between the text and their knowledge of how photos capture only a moment in time to infer that the children would normally have been smiling, moving, and playing
- use what they know about old photography methods to infer that the children had been told to stay still (“not allowed to be children”) to have the photos taken
- think critically about and evaluate the impact of the descriptions, “forever still and emptied of play”.

### The students:

- compare the clothing described in the photographs
- make connections between their own lives and those of the children to infer that moving between countries with different clothing, languages, and customs would be complex
- draw on information that comes later in the poem about the family's situation and integrate this to find deeper meaning in the metaphor.

### The students:

- use the rhetorical questions to evaluate the family's situation and the concerns they must have had
- ask questions and use information across the text to clarify that the family decided to leave the three oldest boys in China and take the girls and youngest boy with them
- form hypotheses about where the children left behind would live and how long it might be before they were able to join the family in New Zealand
- infer that the writer's father and his two older brothers were left behind in China until the family had saved enough to pay the tax
- infer, despite the lack of direct evidence, that the writer's father did return and that Alison Wong was probably born in New Zealand
- draw conclusions about the writer's purpose, for example, that she wanted to show how difficult life was for her father's family in their new country.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *This was a complex text. You've combined several strategies to understand how hard life was for the writer's father. This was necessary to really understand the author's message.*
- *You've compared the father's experience to that of the children in the book The Refugees. Comparing themes across these two texts helped you to connect to your own life and realise how lucky most of us in New Zealand have been to be able to lead ordinary family lives.*

### METACOGNITION

- Tell me about the discussions you had with your partner. How did working together help you get more meaning from this poem?
- What did you do to make sense of the different time frames within the poem?
- Do you find poems harder or easier to read than stories? Why is that?



Reading standard: by the end of year 7



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks



# Instructional focus – Writing

**Social Sciences** (Level 4 – Understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities.)

**English** (Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.)

## Text excerpts from “Family Photographs”

There are two photographs of my father and his family when he was young.

They all wear long socks that wrinkle at the ankles. The older boys wear a tie and a handkerchief folded in their jacket pocket.

The brothers wear light cotton jackets with Mandarin collars. They wear loose cotton trousers.

Who knows what might happen  
On such a long sea journey?

How long will it take?

## Examples of text characteristics

### IDEAS

Writers find their ideas in many different ways and places. One way is to start with an artefact: a special treasure, an everyday item, or a photograph. The artefact triggers memories, emotions, or imagined events to write about.

### DETAILS

Writers use small details to help readers to “see” characters and events more clearly. The details help focus and hold the readers’ attention on the person or things being described.

### REPETITION

Repeating a pattern of similar but different details can be used to strengthen their impact. They draw the reader to compare characters or events.

### RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

A rhetorical question is one that does not require an answer. It is used to prompt thinking or consideration of an idea or problem.

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Prompt the students to consider their ideas.

- *Where do ideas come from?*
- *How can you take another writer’s idea and make it your own?*
- *How does your planning help you develop the idea into something you can write about?*
- *What form will your writing take? It is best to develop the idea in a poem or in some other way? Why is that?*
- *What could you borrow or use from this poem?*

Prompt the students to consider how they can use details.

- *In this poem, the writer used some very small details to help us understand something important about the children. She gave us ways to compare their lives in two different countries. Notice how she includes adjectival phrases or clauses to include these details.*
- *How will you use details to take your readers deeper into your idea?*
- *Imagine you’re using a microscope on an important item or character. What features can you describe to help your readers get a clear picture or to visualise?*

Encourage them to think about ways they might use repetition.

- *The poet repeats words and phrases in several places in the poem, which prompts you to compare details in the two photographs. Could you use repetition in a similar way in your poem?*

Explain what a rhetorical question is and how it can be used.

- *In this poem, the writer asks two questions but she doesn’t give answers. The questions help us think about how the family felt as they set sail from China to New Zealand and how the boys felt about having to wait to join them.*
- *Review your writing and see if there is a place for a rhetorical question. What will you want your readers to think about?*
- *Check your writing with a partner. Does the question help to get your message across?*

## GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You’ve taken Alison Wong’s idea and used a photo of your grandmother as a child as your inspiration. It’s good to see that you know that you can borrow ideas from other writers. Think about whether you will use facts about her or whether you will imagine what her life was like and what she might have been doing or thinking when the photo was taken.*
- *Telling the story of the pounamu you wear was a great idea. You describe where it was found, the person who carved it, and the tipuna who owned it before you. Those details make it come to life and show me how important it is to you.*

## METACOGNITION

- What message did you want to convey to readers? How will you know if you’ve succeeded?
- In what other ways could you have told your story? Can poetry be more effective than narrative for some ideas?

Writing standard: by the end of year 7

The Literacy Learning Progressions