



## Overview

This historical fiction story is set in the West Coast mining town of Blackball in the early 1900s. Laurie, a twelve-year-old boy whose father is a coal miner, tells the story. When the miners go on strike, Laurie realises his family won't be able to afford the new boots he needs. Laurie sets off to find some gold. Instead he finds a fatally injured old miner (a "hatter") who opens up the possibility that there are more options than mining.

This complex and multi-layered story is convincingly told in the voice of the main character. It provides much food for thought and discussion and an excellent model for writing.

It would be helpful to involve students in relevant background research before reading the story. One useful source is *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*:  
- Gold mining: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/gold-and-gold-mining>  
- The Blackball miners' strike: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/strikes-and-labour-disputes/page-4>

This narrative:

- requires some knowledge of mining, strikes, and the gold rush years in New Zealand
- assumes readers will recognise that some of the language (colloquial and idiomatic) is different from how we speak today and was probably used a long time ago
- requires readers to consider complex layers of meaning
- provides opportunities for exploring how individuals, groups, and communities make decisions about their lives and the lives of others.

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

### Texts related by theme

“The Leather Satchel” SJ L3 Aug 2015 | “Bright Fine Gold” SJ L3 May 2015 | “Finding Gold” SJ L3 May 2015 | “War in Waihi: The 1912 Goldminers’ Strike” SJ L4 Oct 2013 | “In the End” SJ L4 Oct 2013

## Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

into my ears and pulled...  
“You’re dreaming, Laurie,” Pearl said. “You’ll never find a nugget in them boots. You can’t even win a game of marbles.”  
That got me mad. I did the walk in cracking time, imagining the look on Pearl’s face when I proved her wrong.  
I saw a gold nugget once, in the window of a jeweller’s shop in Greymouth. It looked like a tiny golden potato, and for the first hour, panning in Clarke Creek, I pictured a perfect little nugget just like it in the bottom of my pan. When you’re shimmying out the stones and gravel, you’re always just about to get lucky – if not in this pan, then the next one, or the one after that. I reckon that kind of thinking is what hooked all those men during the gold rushes.



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

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sentences that vary in length, including long complex sentences that contain a lot of information

Down a coal mine, the air was...  
crushed by a rockfall or go under a coal tub. Or maybe an explosion. The year I was born, sixty-five men breathed poisonous gas and died in the Brunner mine. I tried not to think about where I was headed once I’d finished with school.  
Instead, I asked the Professor about his days chasing gold. He did his best to answer, but he was starting to shake, and his breath came fast and raggedly. After a time, he went silent. That scared me, so I took over the talking. I told him how I needed winter boots, how Athol Crewe could spit from the schoolhouse to the fence. I was telling him that Mum had more jam at home and she’d make scones to go with it, when crash – the Professor went over, taking me with him.  
I tried to get him up, but he was past it.  
“I’ll run the rest of the way,” I said. “I’ll get Dad.”  
The Professor grabbed my arm. Then he spoke. He was so quiet I had to lean in to hear. “The gold’s not just in the creek, Laurie. It’s all around us. Take your chances, son. Make your own luck.”  
I thought he really had gone loose in the head. But I swear, his eyes looked clear into mine. “This world is golden,” he said. “I am lucky to have known it.” That’s what Baldy would call the past tense. The way you talk when something is over and done with.  
“Hold on, Professor,” I said. And I ran.  
Dad and Mr Higgins. I didn’t go back with them. Dad... his boots

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

“It’s Shakespeare,” he added. “Do you know which play?”  
I shook my head.  
“The Scottish play. I can’t say its proper name. It’s bad luck.”  
I told him it was a bit late to worry about bad luck, and he actually laughed.  
We set off down the track, me doing my best to take the Professor’s weight. It felt like the three-legged race at the town picnic: stepping on toes and trying not to go over in a heap.

metaphor, analogy, and connotative language that is open to interpretation

# Possible curriculum contexts

## SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 4 – Understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities; Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.

## ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

## ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

## Possible reading purposes

- To learn why a boy's life in a gold mining town in the early 1900s is changed
- To consider and compare the possible choices Laurie had for his future
- To understand the causes and possible effects of a strike
- To think critically about the way young people make decisions about their future
- To consider how one experience can impact on our lives.

## Possible writing purposes

- To use the text as a model for writing first-person, realistic fiction
- To tell another story set in the past
- To imagine and write about Laurie's life as a young man
- To use the text as a springboard for writing and research into mining, unions, and strikes – or life in the early 1900s.



# Text and language challenges

## VOCABULARY

- Possibly unfamiliar words and concepts, including “strike”, “crib”, “tucker”, “doorstops”, “scrimping”, “chilblains”, “panning”, “nugget”, “shimmying”, “piddling”, “hatters”, “swag”, “doolally”, “maggoty”
- The large number of colloquial expressions and archaic words and terms including “on tick”, “quick smart”, “in cracking time”, “I’ll be bound”
- Use of metaphor: “drawing a long bow”, “bending the truth”, “under her feet”
- The use of modal auxiliaries in verb phrases to signal possibility: “would say”, “could have afforded”, “wouldn’t have gone”, “wouldn’t have found”
- The literal and connotative meanings of “gold”.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Some of these strategies may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.
- In preparation for reading, generate discussion that will enable unfamiliar and archaic words and expressions to be introduced. Some students who are English language learners may find the dialogue especially challenging. You may wish to “translate” some expressions prior to the first reading to help them with basic comprehension. On subsequent readings, allow time for students to work together to interpret the colloquial expressions.
  - Explore the meaning of “hatter” in the context of this story.
  - Explain that chilblains are very painful (burning, itching) swellings of toes and sometimes fingers, usually caused by being very cold.
  - Explain and explore the use of verb phrases that contain a modal auxiliary: see *Exploring Language*, page 66–68, and the example in the Writing section of these notes.
  - *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 gold rushes and gold mining in New Zealand
- Some understanding of strikes and why workers would strike
- Some understanding of the impact of hard times, such as families not being able to afford shoes and “scrimping” on food
- An awareness of the choices young people face as they approach adulthood and the impact of parental expectations
- Some awareness of literature and the world of ideas, including the role of professors and some knowledge of Shakespeare.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Provide resources and online links to support students to find out about the setting prior to reading. Support them to identify the areas in New Zealand where mining, including gold mining, took place and the places where major incidents (accidents, strikes, finds) occurred.
- Use the Te Ara links provided on page 1 of these notes.
- Check that students recognise the name Shakespeare and that the hatter is called “Professor” because, like a teacher at a university, he is a well-educated man. Point out that “Professor” is capitalised because that is the name people call him (that is, it’s a proper noun).
- Tell students that the play *Macbeth* is often referred to as “the Scottish play” because of a superstition about uttering the name in a theatre.
- Consider providing English language learners with a plot outline prior to reading because much of the action is not explicitly stated (for example, the Professor’s death at the end).
- As students read, stop them frequently to check their understanding.
- Clarify that although the mine referred to in the story is a coal mine, many references are made to the gold mining that took place on the West Coast in the previous century.

## TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Historical, realistic fiction told in the first person
- An introductory section that foreshadows the events in the story
- The author’s note that confirms the setting in true events
- Layers of meaning
- Repeated references to boots
- The ironic use of the word “joke”.

## Possible supporting strategies

- Review what students know about historical fiction and the way writers craft stories to be realistic. Share some examples, noting the use of the first person, the voice, the realistic details, and the historical settings.
- Alert students to read for layers of meaning by thinking critically about the implied significance of words, actions, thoughts, and events.



# Instructional focus – Reading

**Social Sciences** (Level 4 – Understand how formal and informal groups make decisions that impact on communities; Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.)

**English** (Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.)

## First reading

- Provide materials to build background knowledge about the historical context.
- Read the introductory paragraph with the students. *What do you learn about the narrator? What might the metaphors “drawing a long bow” and “bending the truth” mean? Why would he want to “bend the truth”? What more do you learn from this introduction? Students may require specific background knowledge to understand the meaning of these expressions.*
- Remind the students to draw on their reading strategies as they begin to read the story: the first reading is to enjoy the story and understand the overall plot.

## If the students struggle with this text

- Provide background information that students will need to be able to understand the text.
- Support the students to read the story, one short section at a time. Stop to review each section by asking questions and recording details on a story map. *Who are the characters? How do they relate to each other? Where is this part set? What happened in this section?*
- Provide interpretations for unfamiliar words or expressions, and support students to understand them.
- When the students have read the whole story, review the story map to make sure they understand the overall plot.

## Subsequent readings

### The teacher

Set the purpose for reading. Ask questions to support students to understand the reasons for, and implications of, the strike.

- *Why does Dad think it's a good joke on the bosses? How does this relate to the other joke he mentions? Is he really being funny?*
- *What do you know about strikes that can help you understand Mum's reaction?*
- *What might be the result of the strike? Look for clues elsewhere in the text that can help your thinking.*

### The teacher

Direct the students to work in pairs to read the first section of dialogue between Laurie and the Professor. They can complete one reading aloud together, then switch roles. Based on the dialogue and Laurie's thoughts, discuss the underlying messages.

- *What do you think the Professor meant when he said the strike was for Laurie's future?*
- *Why didn't Laurie respond to that? What was he thinking?*

If necessary, explain that although Laurie's main problem in the story is his need for boots, he is also starting to think about his future.

- *What clues tell you this? How does the Professor help him?*

### The teacher

Prompt the students to think critically about the author's purpose and the message she wants to convey.

- *With your partner, discuss what you think are the meanings of the following expressions: “dead man's boots”, “too big for his boots”, and “big boots to fill”.*
- *See if you can connect these expressions to the ideas in the story.*
- *Why do you think the author called the story “Hatter's Gold”?*

## GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You made a list of old-time words and expressions so you could look up their meanings. I noticed you'd worked most of them out from the context already though. It's always a good idea to try to work them out from the context first.*
- *Your experience of panning for gold helped you understand how hard it was to find the gold. Making a connection to your own experience helped you to understand exactly what Laurie was doing when he was “shimmying out the stones and gravel”.*

## METACOGNITION

- Tell me what you did to follow the events in this story. Which parts were confusing? What did you do when you were confused?
- How did it help to act out the conversation between Laurie and the Professor? How does this kind of visualising help you understand the deeper meanings of the words that characters say?

### The students:

- make connections between the reference to jokes to infer that “joke” is used ironically
- make predictions (based on Mum's reaction) that there will be no pay during the strike and the family will have to cut back on their expenses
- use the reference to the thickness of the bread slices to confirm their predictions
- make and confirm predictions that, ultimately, the strike was successful and conditions improved.

### The students:

- visualise the feelings and intentions of Laurie and the Professor
- ask questions and make connections within the text to infer that the Professor assumes Laurie will work in the mines when he leaves school
- integrate information in the text (the strike, the Professor's words) with what they know about parents' wishes for their children to infer that Laurie's parents expect he will become a miner too
- discuss the words of the dying Professor to determine that he is using “gold” as a metaphor for life
- integrate and evaluate the ideas in this section and form their own opinions about the decisions young people make about their futures.

### The students:

- make connections between the literal and figurative use of “boots” in the text to infer that Laurie has the Professor's wisdom as well as his boots to “fill” or grow into
- infer that “gold” is used with a double meaning – the real gold the hatters search for and the metaphorical gold of life and opportunities that he wanted Laurie to seek out
- synthesise the explicit and implicit meanings of the text with the factual information in the “Author's note” to form an opinion about the author's purpose.



Reading standard: by the end of year 8



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; Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.)

**English** (Level 4 – Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

## Text excerpts from “Hatter’s Gold”

If the strike hadn’t gone ahead, Mum could have afforded to buy me new boots, like she’d been planning. I wouldn’t have gone looking for gold ... and I wouldn’t have found the Professor ...

I said it like the idea had just come to me, but Pearl wasn’t fooled. It’s like she pokes her warty fingers into my ears and pulls my thoughts out while I’m sleeping. “You’re dreaming, Laurie,” she said.

“Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him, eh, Laurie?” the Professor said ...

“The gold’s not just in the creek, Laurie. It’s all around us. Take your chances, son. Make your own luck.”

“This world is golden,” he said.  
“I am lucky to have known it.”

## Examples of text characteristics

### POINT OF VIEW/VOICE

Telling a story in the first person allows the writer to convey a character’s thoughts and feelings. The story can be told from one specific point of view or perspective, using the “voice” of the character.

### MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

An auxiliary verb supports other verbs. Modal auxiliary verbs help convey such things as probability, intention, possibility, ability, obligation, or an alternative outcome in the future.

### VIVID IMAGERY

A vivid description or image helps readers imagine what is being described more accurately – or gives an emotive intent behind the visual image.

### CHARACTER

Character is shown through words and actions – and by implication. Writers can use dialogue to show character, rather than telling readers about the person directly.

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Prompt the students to consider how they want to convey their purpose to their audience.

- *How will you tell your story? What message or purpose do you have in mind? How will the voice affect this?*
- *If you use a character’s voice, check with a partner to make sure it sounds authentic: does your character “speak” using words and expressions that are appropriate for their age and era?*

Explain that by using the verbs “could” and “would”, the writer is showing what might have happened (or, because of the negative used, what might NOT have happened).

- *As your writing becomes more complex, you need to express your ideas accurately. Check that your sentences make sense. Read them aloud. Do they sound right? Check them with a partner to make sure they sound right and are correct.*
- *If you are unsure, look at the verbs to make sure that the tenses within a sentence agree and that the verbs use the correct singular or plural forms.*

Prompt the students to consider how they create descriptions.

- *Find a place in your writing where you want readers to understand exactly what something looked, felt, sounded, or tasted like. What images could you use to convey how good, bad, scary, disgusting, delicious, or horrifying this is?*
- *Try it out in writing and ask your writing partner to give you feedback. Is it too extreme? Not strong enough?*

Prompt the students to reread the extract.

- *How has the writer used the Professor’s way of speaking to imply things about him?*
- *When you’re writing dialogue, focus on what characters say and how they speak. It may help to read your dialogue out loud now and again as you write.*

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- *Retelling this story from the mother’s point of view was a good way of showing another perspective on the impact of living in a mining town.*
- *Using the words of te reo Māori in the dialogue was effective. It shows your readers that the two characters respected each other’s cultures and tried to get along better.*

### METACOGNITION

- Tell me about the kinds of reading you do and how your reading influences your writing.
- When and how do you think about the knowledge your readers will bring to the text? Would you change your style or the content for different audiences? In what ways?

Writing standard: by the end of year 8

The Literacy Learning Progressions