

King and Country

by André Ngāpō

16 August 1914

Tipu watches the raging debate across the marae ātea. The open space in front of the meeting house is like a battlefield. Most of the men wear suits, and they are focused, armed with carefully chosen words. They stand, one by one, to take shots at the other side.

“And even if they ask us to fight, why should we?” shouts one old warrior, resolute in his korowai. “This isn’t our war. It belongs to the British. Let them fight it!” Nods and sounds of agreement ripple through the crowd. Tipu looks at his brother, but his eyes are locked on the action, giving nothing away.

The next chief begins his whaikōrero, coming quickly to his main point. “What will we do if the enemy lands here? Will we lay down our patu? No! We will have no choice but to fight.” The chief waves his own patu, emphasising his every word. “So why wait?” he continues. “Let us fight now, alongside the white man as equals.” There are cheers – louder than before – and Tipu joins in. This is what he came to hear.

Eventually all the chiefs have had their say, but as the people make their way from the marae, the talk continues. “I don’t know about you,” Tipu says, “but I’m signing up. I’m not missing out on a chance like this.”

“We’ll see, little brother,” Rongo says. “We’ll see.”



19 September 1914

The war cry sounds across the paddock, and Tipu feels the thrill run deep. Rugby matches are one of the few times he socialises with Pākehā. The Settlers are favourites to win. They usually are. They know the rules inside out.

The crowd cheers at the starting kick. Tipu catches the ball straight off and sprints towards the line of opposition players, the leather oval tucked into his side. One of the young farmers lines him up – the one they call Big George – and even though Tipu is the youngest on his team, he’s also one of the largest and the most desperate to prove himself. Tipu throws out a fending arm, but Big George wraps him in a great tackle.

“That’s right, Big Georgie,” shouts a man on the sideline. “You show him!”

The two of them battle throughout the game. Although the Māori are losing, Tipu does his best to take on George. They play each other to a standstill, the crowd cheering for both sides – but especially for the two determined, young opponents.

After the game, the teams line up to shake hands. “Not bad,” says George, his big red face creased with a smile. “Better luck next time.” Tipu smiles back warily and takes George’s sweaty hand. He shakes each player’s hand in turn, but the last man is distracted by a commotion on the sideline. Tipu turns to see his younger cousin, Rāhia, waving a newspaper.



“Look! They’re calling for a native contingent,” he yells.

“Are you going?” George asks, once he’s taken a look at the article.

“Yes,” says Tipu. “For sure.”

“I’ve already signed up,” George says. “I’m going to fight for king and country. Someone has to teach those Germans a lesson. I’m heading off for training next week.”

Rongo studies the paper intently. “Hey, Tipu. It says here you have to be twenty to go.”

“What?” says Tipu.

Tipu follows behind Rongo, barely able to control his anger. His horse stumbles, and Tipu yanks on the reins, cursing in frustration. Back at the village, his whaea sees the look in his eyes.

“He aha, Tipu?”

Tipu doesn’t answer and storms into the whare. He throws himself on

his bed, listening as Rongo explains how Tipu is too young to sign up.

“But I think I’ll go,” Rongo says to their mother carefully. “Everyone else is – and they’re saying it won’t last long.”

There is a short, heavy silence. “I know your father’s iwi supports the government,” Whaea says, “but some Māori have good reason not to fight this war. Don’t forget your Waikato tīpuna, son.”

Whaea has never forgotten. Tipu listens as she reminds Rongo of the land confiscation in the Waikato during the 1860s, of the lives lost trying to defend that land in the colonial wars. “There are more important things than a young man’s adventure,” their mother says firmly. “When our land is returned, then you will have my blessing to go.”

Tipu waits for a response that never comes.

3 August 1915

Rāhia is reading Rongo’s letter. Whaea makes him read it aloud most days. It was written in May and sent from Egypt, and the postmark shows it has travelled through England – both places Tipu has never seen. Tipu has heard Rongo’s letter countless times, knows the words by heart, and this time, he barely listens. Instead he imagines he is alongside Rongo, doing the haka his brother describes, shirtless beneath the North African sun.

Tipu senses his mother leaning in his direction. He knows what she will say.

“The British in Egypt! Yet another land they have taken from the native people.” Whaea’s voice is stony and hard, but her eyes are shiny with the tears that have been there since the day Rongo left.

Tipu feels torn. He knows that he should be loyal to his mother’s iwi, that he should stay with her now Rongo has gone. But news has spread about Gallipoli. Big George has been killed there. Tipu wants to be with his brother more than ever.





8 September 1916

Tipu and the other new recruits hastily make their way along the deep trench that they call Turk Lane. It is being built by the Pioneer Battalion, behind the front line in France, where they are supposedly safe – although the lieutenant has just spoken about the shelling the day before and of the need to be on guard.

“Are you all right, Tipu?” the lieutenant asks. “You don’t look so good.”

“I’m fine,” Tipu says.

But Tipu isn’t fine. He’s shocked by the smell and the chaos and the injured soldiers they’ve passed; overwhelmed by the long journey they’ve made to reach France, so far from home. And he still hasn’t seen his brother, despite the lieutenant’s assurance that Rongo is nearby. Instead, they pass three neat mounds in the dirt, and Tipu’s heart drops – yet more dead.

A short distance ahead, a group is digging through the mess that the shelling has caused. One of the men looks up and moves towards them. “Tipu!” he calls.

It’s Rongo, covered in mud. While the rest of the battalion works to clear the debris, the two brothers embrace each other for a long time.



Rongo finally speaks. “You don’t know how good it is to see you, little brother.” Tipu keeps his arms around Rongo, grips him tight. He’s not ready to let go.

“How is everyone at home?” Rongo eventually asks. He gently pushes Tipu away.

“They were all fine when I left,” Tipu replies. “Whaea was relieved to hear you’re behind the front line.”

“But not happy you’re here now, too,” Rongo says.

“No,” says Tipu. “She says I’m to bring you home.”

There is a brief silence, then the sound of artillery in the distance.

Rongo looks towards the three graves, and Tipu can see the grief and his brother trying to hold it back. Probably he knew the men, but Tipu can’t bring himself to ask. Instead he walks towards some shovels and takes one from the pile.

The sound of gunfire grows fainter with the sunlight. The two brothers join the other Pioneers, strung along the trench like men in a waka. Side by side, they begin to dig – and as they work, Tipu imagines they are in that waka, paddling their way home.



King and Country

by André Ngāpō

illustrations by Andrew Burdan

Text and illustrations copyright © Crown 2014

For copyright information about how you can use this material go to:
<http://www.tki.org.nz/Copyright-in-Schools/Terms-of-use>

Published 2014 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6011, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz
All rights reserved.
Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 0 478 43935 9 (online)

Publishing services Lift Education E tū
Series Editor: Susan Paris
Designer: Jodi Wicksteed
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Emeli Sione and Hōne Apanui

King and Country

by André Ngāpō

16 August 1914

Tipu watches the raging debate across the marae ātea. The open space in front of the meeting house is like a battlefield. Most of the men wear suits, and they are focused, armed with carefully chosen words. They stand, one by one, to take shots at the other side.

"And even if they ask us to fight, why should we?" shouts one old warrior, resolute in his korowai. "This isn't our war. It belongs to the British. Let them fight it!" Nods and sounds of agreement ripple through the crowd. Tipu looks at his brother, but his eyes are locked on the action, giving nothing away.

The next chief begins his whaikōrero, coming quickly to his main point. "What will we do if the enemy lands here? Will we lay down our patu? No! We will have no choice but to fight." The chief waves his own patu, emphasising his every word. "So why wait?" he continues. "Let us fight now, alongside the white man as equals." There are cheers – louder than before – and Tipu joins in. This is what he came to hear.

Eventually all the chiefs have had their say, but as the people make their way from the marae, the talk continues. "I don't know about you," Tipu says, "but I'm signing up. I'm not missing out on a chance like this."

"We'll see, little brother," Rongo says. "We'll see."



SCHOOL JOURNAL

June 2014

The New Zealand Curriculum
LEVEL
4



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 4, JUNE 2014

Curriculum learning area	Social Sciences
Reading year level	8
Keywords	First World War, Māori soldiers, marae, Māori language, Pākehā/Māori relations, rugby, Māori conscription