

KORO'S SONG

BY ANDRÉ NGĀPŌ



“Look. We’re here!” says Mana, pointing to a sign: Uenuku Ecovillage. He’s so excited. We’ve been travelling all day, and he hasn’t stopped talking.

I feel sick. Sick of this place already.

Mum drives slowly down a gravel road that ends in a rough clearing. I guess you could call it a car park. We can see a covered stage and a hall and a kitchen – all painted rainbow colours – but mostly, there’s just bush.

“Wow,” says Mum. “This place really lives up to its name.”

Uenuku means rainbow. Mum loves bringing this up. We’re spending the entire holidays here without her, so she wants us to think everything’s going to be great.

“Look,” says Mana. “There’s Nan and Ivan.”

Nan’s face is one big smile, and Ivan’s standing right beside her. He’s holding Nan’s hand, just like Koro used to.

“Follow us to the whare,” Nan calls. She waves the car towards a bright yellow shack I recognise from photos. It looks smaller in real life.

Inside, the whare doesn’t feel any bigger. “Good trip?” Nan asks, pulling Mana into a hug. She stretches her other arm out to me.

“Fine,” I say, leaning in to Nan’s shoulder. I can never resist her hugs.

“Great to have you here, boys,” Ivan says. He shakes my hand, then Mana’s. It’s only the second time we’ve met, but he acts like he’s known us for ages. “We’ve got lots of fun things planned,” he says.

Two weeks in the bush with no friends and no electricity. Two weeks of Ivan. Doesn’t sound like fun to me.

When Mum leaves, I go outside to wave goodbye. I don’t stop till the car’s disappeared round the bend.

Nan introduces us to all the people at Uenuku. Everyone seems nice, I guess, and there're quite a few kids our age: Carlos, Shiloh, Te Aroha, Toko, and Sage. They ask if we want to go swimming at the ford.

"There's a waterfall and a rope swing," says Te Aroha. "And eels."

"Cool," says Mana.

"Might as well," I say. *There's nothing else to do.*

Before the swim, we get a tour. We visit the pizza oven and the hāngī pit. Toko points out the wind turbine and the solar panels and the nursery, which is filled with native seedlings. I can't believe they want more bush! Beside the nursery, there are beehives shaped like little houses. Ivan's the head beekeeper. The kids seem to really like him.

They save the best till last. We cross a grassy clearing to a massive tree hut, high in a macrocarpa. The hut's painted the same bright colours as the other buildings here. We somehow miss the swim. Instead, we hang out in the tree till it's nearly dark. Carlos tells jokes – he's funny as – and Sage tells us about the talent show. *This place isn't too bad, I guess.*

We wake in the morning to the smell of pancakes and the sound of a ukulele. For a moment, I think it's Koro playing – but it's only Ivan.

"You're good," says Mana. "Can I have a turn?"

I think about our ukuleles back home. They're smaller than Ivan's. Koro gave them to us when we were little. I haven't played since he died.

Nan calls out from the kitchen like she's reading my mind. "I forgot to tell you boys to pack your ukes."

"It's all right," says Ivan. "There are a few extras floating around the village. And you can play mine anytime."

"Thanks," says Mana. "Where's Koro's uke?"

"In Tūrangi with your Uncle Nik," says Nan.

Mana strums a few chords after breakfast. Ivan's uke sounds nice, but not as nice as Koro's.

Nan has a doctor's appointment, so Ivan takes us to the market to sell candles and honey. We set up a folding table and wait for the people to come. It doesn't take long. The honey's popular – or maybe it's Ivan. He seems to know everyone and spends a lot of time talking.

One man asks Ivan if we're his grandsons. Ivan looks so pleased I think he's going to say yes. The thought makes me really mad, and I speak without thinking.

"No way," I say. "I have my own koro."

"Dom!" says Mana. He's shocked. "Don't be mean!"

Ivan looks a bit upset, and I feel my face go red.

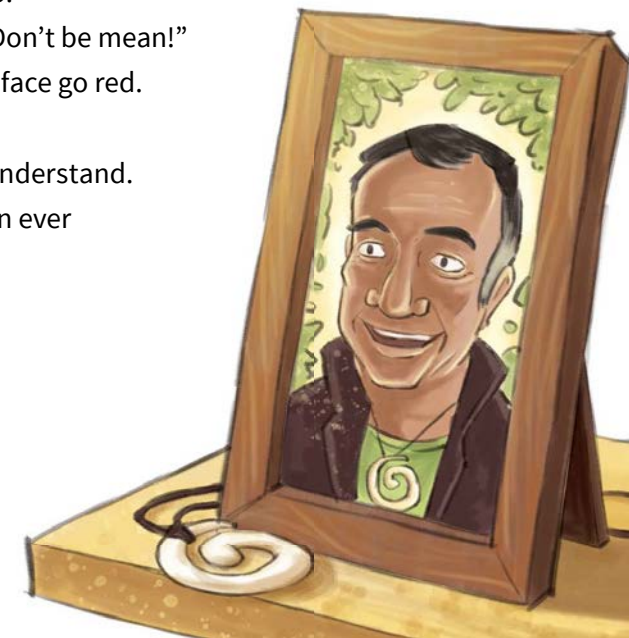
"Sorry, Ivan."

Ivan nods. "That's OK," he says. "I understand. Your koro was one of a kind. No one can ever replace him."

I don't say anything.

"I miss him heaps," says Mana.

Me too.



The Uenuku kids are amped about the talent show. It's obviously a big deal. Te Aroha and Carlos are doing magic tricks. Shiloh's made puppets. Toko and Sage are going to sing.

"Do you guys want to do something?" Sage asks.

"Us?" I say. "Like what?"

Mana knows what. "We could play Koro's song," he says. "Do you remember the words, Dom?"

Of course I do, but I shake my head. "We haven't played in ages," I remind him.

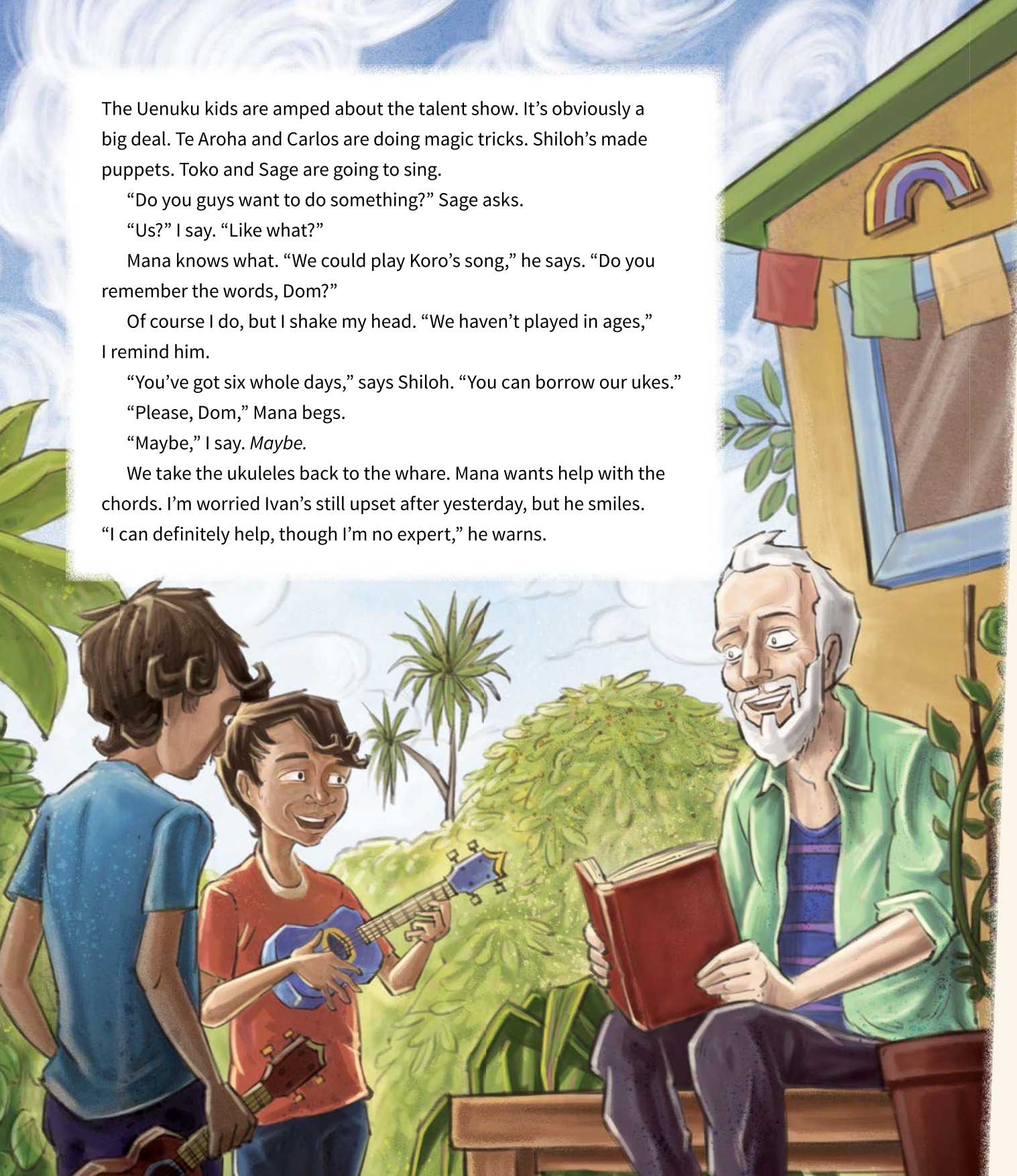
"You've got six whole days," says Shiloh. "You can borrow our ukes."

"Please, Dom," Mana begs.

"Maybe," I say. *Maybe.*

We take the ukuleles back to the whare. Mana wants help with the chords. I'm worried Ivan's still upset after yesterday, but he smiles.

"I can definitely help, though I'm no expert," he warns.



While the others swim, Mana and I practise. Despite what Ivan said, he's a pretty good player – and he has a way of explaining things that always makes sense.

When the next market day comes round, Ivan says to take our ukes. He insists on setting up alone. Once he's laid out the candles and arranged the jars of honey in a pyramid, he sits on a stool and listens to us play.

"I can't believe how much you've improved," he says. "It's only been a week."

"Five days, actually," Mana says.

"Your koro must've been a great teacher. Either that – or you're both naturals."

"Maybe a bit of both," says Mana. "You're a good teacher, too."

I nod in agreement. *It's true.*

The day of the talent show is hot. When the sun finally starts to go down, it's time. Shiloh's brother arrives at the hall with a box drum. Someone else turns up dressed as a clown. It even looks like a dog's going to perform.

We're scheduled after Shiloh's puppet show. We wait by the side of the stage while Nan tries to keep Mana calm. Ivan's there, too. "How are you feeling, boys?" he asks.

"Pretty nervous," says Mana.

Ivan nods. "I've been there. You'll get through it. What about you, Dom?"

"I feel good," I say. And it's true – I do. Then I surprise us both. I lean into Ivan. He wraps an arm round me, and it's big and warm and strong. Just like Koro's.

The audience is clapping, and Shiloh leaves the stage. I walk up the steps with Mana and feel a smile light up my face.

illustrations by Kieran Rynhart

Koro's Song

by André Ngāpō

Text copyright © Crown 2018

Illustrations by Kieran Ryanhart copyright © Crown 2018

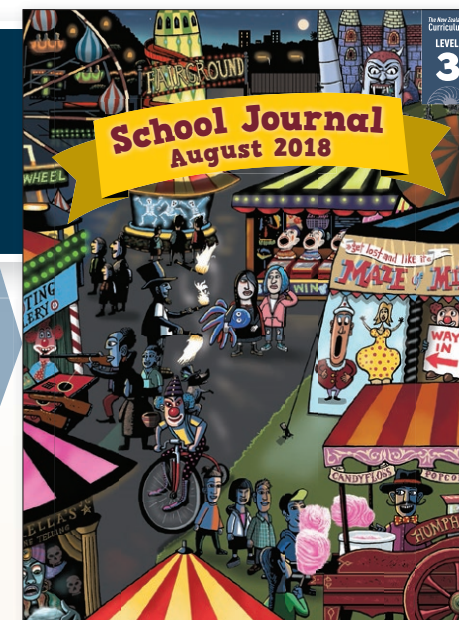
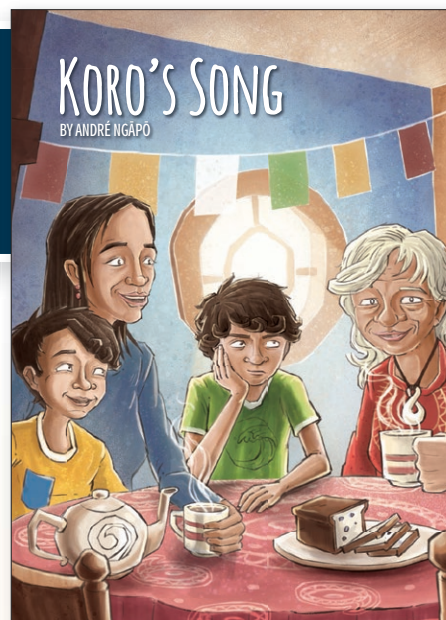
For copyright information about how you can use this material, go to:
<http://www.tki.org.nz/Copyright-in-Schools/Terms-of-use>

Published 2018 by the Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz

All rights reserved.
Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 1 77669 348 1 (online)

Publishing Services: Lift Education E Tū
Editor: Susan Paris
Designer: Liz Tui Morris
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui, Ross Calman, and Emeli Sione



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 3 AUGUST 2018

Curriculum learning areas	English
Reading year level	Year 5
Keywords	change, community, eco-village, family, grandparents, grief, loss, music, new partners, performance, relationships, school holidays, ukuleles, whānau