



Overview

This is a retelling of the traditional Māori tale of Rātā and his quest to find a tree to make a waka. In his haste, Rātā forgets to ask permission from Tāne-mahuta, the god of the forest, and finds that each time he chops down his chosen tree, it is mysteriously restored the next day.

As well as speaking directly to Māori students, this story provides opportunities for all students to make connections to their own understandings about traditional tales, cultural practices, and respect for the natural environment.

The text requires students to “confidently use a range of processing and comprehension strategies to make meaning from and think critically about” text (from *The Literacy Learning Progressions*, page 14).

A PDF of this traditional tale and an audio version as an MP3 file are available at www.juniorjournal.tki.org.nz

Related texts

Māori myths and tales: *How Kiwi Saved the Forest* (Ready to Read, shared); *Maui and the Sun* (Ready to Read, Purple); “Hinemoa and Tūtānekai” (JJ 46); “Kāhu and Hōkioi” (JJ 51)

Texts with a focus on trees or other plants: “Pōhutukawa” (JJ 45); “Rongoā Māori” and “Helpful Trees and Plants” (JJ 49); “Kākano” (a poem) and “Seeds” (JJ 50); “Professor Clever” (a play, JJ 57)

Texts with a focus on tikanga Māori: *Matariki Breakfast* (Ready to Read, shared); *Kapa Haka, Te Pēpi Hou* (Ready to Read, Turquoise); *Matariki* (Ready to Read, Gold); “Kahu Ora” (JJ 47); “Rongoā Māori” (JJ 49); “Pepeha”, “Tōku Pepeha – My Pepeha” (JJ 53); “Tukutuku” (a poem) and “Weaving Tukutuku” (JJ 55)

Text characteristics

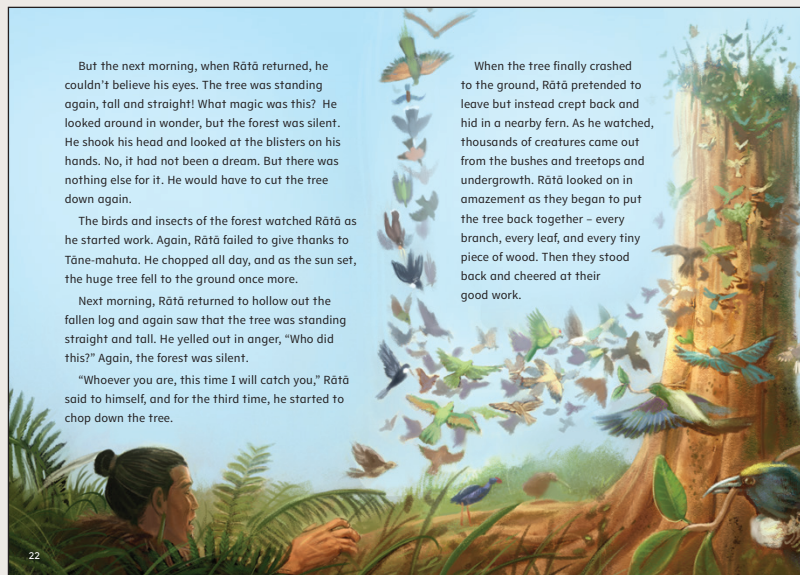
“Rātā me te Rākau” includes the following features that help develop the reading behaviours expected at Purple.

Features of a traditional tale, such as the setting in the distant past, talking animals, magical events, and three attempts at a task

A mix of explicit and implicit content that requires students to make connections between information in the text and their prior knowledge to form and test hypotheses and make inferences

Underlying themes (the importance of cultural protocols and respect for the natural environment)

Several characters and events and shifts in time and place



Some concepts that may be unfamiliar

Ideas and information organised in paragraphs

Some unfamiliar words and phrases (some in te reo Māori) including descriptive language, the meaning of which is supported by the context, the sentence structure, or the illustrations

A variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences and sentences with indicators of time and place so that students are required to notice and use linking words, phrases, and punctuation to clarify the links between ideas

English (Reading)

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

Level 2 – Processes and strategies: Selects and reads texts for enjoyment and personal fulfilment.

Social Sciences

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

Select from and adapt the suggestions below according to your students' strengths, needs, and experiences – their culture, language, and identity (*Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8, Knowledge of the Learner, page 6*).

Possible reading purposes

(*What can the students expect to find out or think about as a result of reading this text?*)

- To find out what happens to Rātā and why the tree is important to him
- To think about how this tale is the same as or different from other versions
- To think about the message in this story

Possible learning goals

(*What opportunities does this text provide for students to learn more about how to “read, respond to, and think critically” about texts?*)

This text provides opportunities for students, over several readings, to:

- **make connections** between information in the story and their prior knowledge to **form and test hypotheses** and **make inferences**
- use key words and phrases to identify and track events (**summarise**)
- **form an opinion** about the **main idea or message**
- **monitor** their own reading and when something is unclear, take action to solve the problem, for example, by rereading a sentence or looking for clues close by.



Text and language features

Vocabulary

Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, for example:

- “rākau”, “searching”, “enough”, “carve”, “Tāwhirimātea”, “Tangaroa”, “do battle”, “destroy”, “weary”, “Thwack”, “massive”, “Kārearea”, “horrified”, “respect”, “Tāne-mahuta”, “striking”, “heard”, “creature”, “thunderous”, “blisters”, “nothing else for it”, “failed”, “give thanks”, “hollow out”, “fallen”, “crept”, “undergrowth”, “amazement”, “furious”, “guardian”, “embarrassed”, “desperate”, “woken”, “explode”, “promised”

Possible supporting strategies

(Use these suggestions before, during, or after reading in response to students' needs.)

Prompt the students to remember the strategies they can use, often in combination, for example:

- when **decoding**:
 - breaking words into word chunks or syllables (for example, “rā-kau”, “wear-y”, “re-spect”, “Tā-ne-mā-hu-ta”, “thun-der-ous”, “hol-low”, “guard-i-an”, “under-growth”)
 - using their knowledge of vowel sounds and vowel digraphs in te reo Māori (Bilingual students may be able to model the pronunciation for other students. The audio version also provides support.)
 - drawing on their knowledge of variations in the sounds of some letters and letter combinations in English (for example, “hear”, “weary” / “heard”, “searching”; “enough”; “battle”; “desperate”)
 - using context and sentence structure to confirm decoding attempts
- when working out the **meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases**:
 - using the context of the sentence or paragraph, looking for clues in the illustrations, and making connections to their prior knowledge
 - reading on to look for further information, including looking at the next word or words to help clarify a noun phrase.

Have dictionaries, including a bilingual dictionary, available for students to confirm or clarify word meanings, but remind them that they can make a best attempt at a word and come back to it later.

Readers are able to use strategies for working out unfamiliar words only when they know most of the vocabulary in the text. For English language learners who need support with vocabulary, introduce and practise selected items before reading.



Introducing the text

A short video on the importance of introducing the text is available at <https://vimeo.com/142446572>

Before introducing this text to your students, you could listen to the audio file to familiarise yourself with the pronunciation of any te reo Māori that is new to you.

Use your knowledge of the students to ensure that your introduction to the text is effective in building or activating their prior knowledge and providing appropriate support for a successful first reading. Several options are provided below for you to **select from and adapt** according to your students' familiarity with the story and/or tikanga Māori.

For English language learners, you could introduce the tale before the whole-group session to build confidence with vocabulary. Read the title and discuss the illustrations on pages 18–23. Give students who share the same first language the opportunity to discuss the story in this language.

- Ask the students to read the title (in Māori and English) and the author byline. Expect them to infer that Rātā is the person shown in the illustration. If “rākau” is new, prompt them to make connections between the two titles to clarify the meaning. If necessary, draw attention to the use of macrons to denote a long (drawn-out) vowel.
- Invite students familiar with the tale to share what they know. Explain that old tales like this have been retold many times and often have an underlying message. Prompt the students to make connections to other traditional tales they are familiar with. Briefly review some of the features of a traditional tale, for example, a far-away or long-ago setting, a task to be completed by the main character (often needing three attempts), talking animals, and magical or supernatural events.
- Ask the students to predict, using the title and the illustrations on page 18, the setting, and what Rātā is doing. If necessary, clarify that the image in the thought bubble is a waka and prompt the students to make the connection to the idea of a waka being carved from a tree.
- Discuss the change of setting and characters in the page 19 illustration. Confirm that this shows the Māori gods of the wind and the sea, feeding their names into the discussion. Ask the students to share what they know about Māori gods and their relationships with the natural world. (This is an opportunity to also feed in the name of Tāne-mahuta, who is mentioned later in the tale.) Encourage them to speculate about the possible relationship between the illustrations on pages 18 and 19. Remind them that they can find out when they read the story.
- Together, set a reading purpose. Share the learning goal(s).
- You could give the students sticky notes to record any questions or ideas they have as they are reading or to mark parts they might want to return to later.

Reading and discussing the text

Suggestions for ways that you can support the students to achieve the learning goals are in the right-hand column of the table below. **Select from and adapt** the suggestions according to your students' needs.

Encourage the students to read the text by themselves, intervening only if it's clear a student needs help. During the first reading, the focus is on students experiencing and enjoying the story, following the events, and making and reviewing predictions (forming and testing hypotheses). Much of the processing that they do is “inside their heads” and may not be obvious until the discussion after the reading. There will be many opportunities to provide support with word-solving and comprehension on subsequent readings.

Student behaviours

Examples of behaviours that will help the students achieve their learning goal(s).

Deliberate acts of teaching

Examples of how you can support individual students (if needed).

The first reading

- The students make connections between their prior knowledge and information in the tale to make inferences and predictions, for example:
 - They infer from the page 19 text and illustration that the battle between the gods will create wild, stormy, dangerous weather and that this is why Rātā is so desperate to find the “right tree”.
 - They predict from the comments of the forest creatures on page 20 that there will be complications ahead for Rātā.
 - At the end of page 22, they make connections between the phrase “for the third time” and their knowledge of the “pattern of three” in traditional tales to predict that something different will happen this time.
 - On page 23, when Rātā discovers what has been happening, they wonder (or predict) what Rātā might do now.
 - On page 24, they use the dialogue and descriptive vocabulary to visualise the contrasting points of view and emotions of the characters.
- Remind the students to keep their reading purpose in mind and to think about what they already know about this tale and/or the common features of traditional tales.
- Encourage them to look for clues in the text (including the dialogue) and the illustrations to help them make inferences about the feelings of the characters and predictions about what might happen.

- The students use the illustrations and key words and phrases, including indicators of time, to track events and the connections between them. For example:
 - They use the information at the end of page 18 to clarify why Rātā wants to build a waka.
 - On page 20, they notice the change in focus from Rātā to the creatures who are watching him (and back to Rātā in the final paragraph on page 21).
 - They use indicators of time (for example, “Tomorrow”, “But the next morning”, “Again”, “as the sun set”, “once more”, “for the third time”) to recognise the pattern of repeated events.
- The students demonstrate self-monitoring and problem solving, for example:
 - On page 20, they quietly articulate the word “Thwack!” and use the illustration and following sentence to infer that this word is describing the sound of the axe.
 - They use the page 20 illustration to clarify that Kārearea is a bird and the context of the sentence and the unfolding story to infer (if they don’t already know) that Tāne-mahuta is a god.
 - On page 22, they use the phrase “on his hands” to confirm “blisters”.
 - They mark aspects they want to come back to.
- They begin to think about why the forest creatures behaved as they did and about the underlying message of the tale.
- Prompt the students to use the illustrations and key words to help them track characters and events. Remind them that they can reread bits to clarify meaning.
- Remind the students of strategies they can use when the meaning is unclear.
- Encourage the students to note things they are not sure of or that are of particular interest. Remind them that asking themselves questions and making notes or marking sections will help to focus their thinking.
- As they finish reading, ask the students to think about their reading purpose and reflect on the deeper meaning of the tale.

Discussing the text

You can revisit this story several times, focusing on different aspects and providing opportunities for the students to build comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. **Select from and adapt** the following suggestions according to your students’ needs and responses to the reading. Some of the suggestions overlap, and several can be explored further as “After reading” activities.

 For some suggestions, you may find it helpful to project the PDF of the tale so that you can zoom in on relevant sections.

- The students share their initial responses. Those students who already knew this story can share their opinions of this version.
- The students summarise the tale and discuss what helped them to make inferences and predictions.
- They use their sticky notes to identify challenges they had or ideas or questions they thought of as they were reading.
- The students identify and discuss clues to Rātā’s feelings, for example:
 - the illustrations
 - explicit information – “was very tired”
 - his actions – “had been searching for many days”
 - the dialogue – “there must be”
 - insights into Rātā’s thinking – “Rātā knew”, “wanted to do what he could”
 - making connections to their own feelings and experiences.
- They think critically about why the characters acted the way they did and about the message of the tale.
- Remind the students of the reading purpose. Encourage them to share their responses to the tale. *What part did you most enjoy? Was there anything that surprised you?* Encourage the students to compare the tale with other versions they know.
- Ask the students to retell the tale and also to reflect on what helped them understand it. *When did you realise why Rātā needed to find a tree? How did knowing about other traditional tales help you to predict what might happen?* Encourage them to refer to their sticky notes to share aspects they are not sure about or that they found particularly interesting.
- Draw out the idea that it is the contrast between the feelings of the characters that makes this story so dramatic and exciting. Focus on Rātā. Have the students reread pages 18–19 to identify aspects that helped them understand Rātā’s feelings at this point. You could start recording the students’ ideas. (They could explore further pages as an after-reading activity.)

Page	How Rātā is feeling	What helped our thinking
18–19	tired frustrated desperate worried determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Rātā was very tired” – he had been searching for a long time – he looks tired in the illustration – he knows wild weather is coming and he wants to help his people escape

Discuss how some of the information is stated explicitly but that there are also clues that the students can put together, as well as thinking about their own experiences to help them imagine (visualise) his feelings. (See also After reading.)

- Encourage the students to think critically. *Why didn’t the forest creatures just tell Rātā what he was doing wrong? Why did they change their minds and help him? What message do you think this tale has for us?*

How you can support your students to be metacognitive

Here are some ways you can build students' awareness of the processes and strategies they are using as they make meaning and think critically.

With support, the students reflect on their learning.


- The students talk with a partner about a word or phrase they found challenging and how they worked it out (or tried to).
- The students identify aspects that helped them infer Rātā's feelings.

Remind the students of the reading purpose and learning goal(s).


- Ask the students to share with a partner a challenge they had when reading and how they solved or attempted to solve it. Listen in and note anything you might need to follow up on.
- Ask questions to prompt the students' thinking. *What helped you to know that Rātā was getting angry?*

After reading: Practice and reinforcement

After-reading tasks should arise from your monitoring of the students' needs during the lesson and provide purposeful practice and reinforcement. Where possible, make links to other texts, including texts generated by the students, and to the wider literacy programme (oral language, writing, handwriting, and word games and activities) and other curriculum areas.

- The students can reread the tale as they listen to the audio version. The audio version also provides English language learners with good models of English pronunciation, intonation, and expression.
- Provide opportunities for the students to reread and discuss this tale and to read other versions and texts with similar themes or ideas (see Related texts).
- Ask the students to retell the tale orally in their own words. They could use the illustrations as a guide. Alternatively, you could have the students work together to dramatise the tale. Encourage them to make up actions and sound effects (using their bodies or instruments), such as sounds for wind and waves, bird song for when the creatures are restoring the tree, and actions for showing emotions such as horror or anger. One student might read the tale aloud while others create the sound effects.
-  The students could create their own audio or video version.
- Build on the characterisation activity started under "Discussing the text". Give pairs of students a printout of another double-page spread and have them highlight clues to characterisation and add them to the chart. Remind them they can find clues in the illustrations, the adjectives (for example, "weary", "horrified"); Rātā's actions (for example, "got straight to work", "looked around in wonder", "jumped out from the fern", "eyes filled with tears"); his dialogue (talking to himself and to others, and noting alternatives to "said" such as "yelled out in anger", "screamed", "promised"); and the author's insights into Rātā's thinking (for example, as described on page 22).

Pages	How Rātā is feeling	What helped our thinking
20–21		
22–23		
24–25		

- Ask the students to draw and write about how Rātā was feeling at various times in the tale (for example, tired, worried, amazed, furious, embarrassed). They could choose two or three examples.
-  They could use Google Slides or Google Drawing to complete this task.
- Depending on students' particular interests, you could use this text as an introduction to finding out more about such aspects as: waka building, tikanga involved in using trees or other plants, Māori gods, kārearea (New Zealand's only falcon), or wētā.
- Draw a chalk line with the words Agree and Disagree at either end. Ask the students to stand on this line to show what they think of statements about the tale and then explain their thinking to others. You may need to talk about words for other places on the continuum, such as "neither", "a little", "mostly". Alternatively, you could draw a line on a large sheet of paper and the students could add a sticky note with their name on it to show their opinion. Statements might include:
 - Rātā should have chosen a smaller tree.
 - Tāwhirimātea and Tangaroa caused this problem.
 - Rātā is a kind and thoughtful person.
 - The forest belongs to the creatures.
 - The creatures should not have ruined Rātā's hard work.
 - Anyone can use what he or she needs from nature.
 - Rātā should have asked and given thanks before he cut the tree down.
 - Trees can be used if you need to build something important.