

MY NEW ZEALAND STORY

Earthquake! Napier, 1930-31

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Synopsis

Katie Bourke is 11 years old. She lives in Napier New Zealand with her mother, her older sister Eileen and her Uncle Mick. Katie's father has just died and the family is having trouble making ends meet. In fact the whole country is in the grip of the Great Depression. Jobs are scarce and many families are struggling to feed and clothe their children. Katie decides that she must help her mother and sister out. Her Uncle Mick often can't work because of the horrors that he faced in World War one. Her brother Tom, who has just returned home after many years away, seems to be more of a hindrance than a help. So Katie gets an after school job. She also works hard to get a chicken for the family, which produces eggs.

Things are going well for Katie, but on 3rd February 1931, her whole world is turned upside down. A violent earthquake strikes Napier and nearby Hastings, killing hundreds. Lucky for Katie her whole family is safe. It is decided that for a little while Katie should live in Wellington with her aunt. Much of the town that Katie has lived in all her life has been decimated. The irony is that the earthquake may be just the thing to release the town from the grips of the Depression. Hundreds of workers are needed to rebuild the town that nature destroyed...

Text Type

Earthquake! Napier, 1930-31 is a fascinating account of New Zealand life during the Great Depression. The story is told in diary form. Katie Bourke is a



courageous young woman who is extremely loyal to her family. She is determined to help her mother and sister any way she can, even if it means sacrificing her dream of becoming a teacher by leaving school early and getting a job. Students unfamiliar with this period in New Zealand history will be fascinated by the accurate descriptions of the living conditions faced by families during the Great Depression. Huge numbers of people were out of work and there was no unemployment benefit. Diseases such as influenza and polio killed thousands and many children died at an early age. There were some modern conveniences such as refrigerators and cars, but few could afford them. The story gives details about the catastrophic earthquake that struck Napier on 3rd February 1931. It also gives the reader an insight into the disturbing effects that the war had on the men who served. Themes explored include struggle and hardship, the importance of family and community spirit, and friendship.

Sharing the Text

The text can be covered in 4-shared sessions and 3 independent reading sessions. It has been divided up as follows: pp. 7-27, pp. 28-79, pp. 80-125, pp. 129-155.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and be careful to establish the setting in time and place before reading the novel, as this is very important to their understanding of the story. Students should also be encouraged to identify themes and explain how they are developed in the novel.

The activities that follow the notes are suitable for students of many different abilities and suit a range of learning styles.

Introducing the Text

Study the cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What is a diary?
- Who does the diary belong to?
- How do you expect a diary to be set out?
- How old is Katie Bourke?
- What is the Great Depression? When did it occur?
- What do you think happens that turns Katie's world upside down?

Now read the Historical Note starting on page 157 and study the photographs. Make your own notes about what life in Napier in the 1930's was like - this will help set the scene for the story.

Teacher reads pp. 7-27 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension - pp. 7-27

- What date does Katie make her first diary entry on? What is significant about this day?
- What school does Katie attend?
- Where does Katie get her diary?
- What religion is Katie? How do you know?
- Who is Katie's best friend?
- Who is Brian? Where does he live? What does he do for a job?
- Who is Tom? Why doesn't he live at home?
- Who are Teddy and Cecily? What happened to them?
- How does Katie's mother earn a living?
- What does Margaret Samson say to Katie that upsets her?
- Why does Katie's mother believe that "plenty of people are worse off than we are"?
- Why is Katie so concerned about the money situation in her household?
- What ideas does Katie come up with to try and help her family?

Discussion

- Describe Katie Bourke. What do we know about her so far? What are her likes and dislikes? What interests her? What kind of person do you think she is? As you continue reading the novel add to your character profile on Katie.
- The story is set in the 1930's when there was no unemployment benefit. What would it have been like for people out of work? How do you think they and their families survived?
- Compare Katie's family life to your own. What do you have that Katie doesn't have? In what ways does Katie's life seem easier or harder than yours?
- From what you have learned so far in the story describe some of the effects of the Great Depression on New Zealanders.



Students read pp. 28-79 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension – pp. 28-79

- Where do the girls decide to go to look for wood for the chicken coup?
How are they going to get there?
- Who does Father Dwyer say a special prayer for at Mass? What help does the church provide for people in their position?
- Why didn't the people at the grocery shop want Katie to work there?
- What work does the lady at the bakery offer Katie? Why is she reluctant to take the job? What does she decide to do instead?
- Who offers Katie a job? What does he want her to do?
- What does Katie give her mother for her birthday? How can she afford it? How does her mother react when she is presented with the gift?
- Who do Roseanne and Katie go and see to discuss their idea to have chickens?
- What do the girls find at the dump that they use for the chicken coup?
- Why is Eileen so grumpy?
- What aspect of the Depression becomes apparent to Katie through her work for Mr Norman?
- Why doesn't Katie's mum want to get an account with Mr Norman?
- When did Eileen start working?
- Why did Uncle Mick lose his job?
- Who turns up unexpectedly for dinner? What does he look like? How does Katie's mother react to the visitor?
- What is Tom like? What does Katie think of him?
- Why doesn't Katie's mum want to accept the widow's pension?
- What does Tom do for Katie that surprises her?
- What do the girls call their hen? When does she lay her first egg? What does Katie's mum do with the egg?
- Katie would like to be a teacher. Why does she feel like she should leave school after she passes Proficiency?
- Why do Katie's mum and Tom argue all the time? Why does Katie feel responsible for one bad argument?
- Why does Katie believe that her family is "pretty lucky" compared to Roseanne's?



Discussion

- Describe Mr Norman. What sort of person is he? In what ways does he show kindness to Katie and others? Why do you think he does this?
- There is a large division between the rich and the poor in Napier during this time. Who in the story is wealthy? Who is struggling? What are some of the reasons why some families are having difficulties? What advantages do the wealthy have? What benefits do they enjoy?
- How does Katie's schooling compare with yours? Which school would you rather attend and why?
- What evidence is there in Katie's diary entries to suggest that the economy is becoming more depressed in Napier?
- How does Eileen feel about Tom? Why is Eileen so grumpy all the time? How does she treat Katie? What realisation does Katie come to about her sister after the argument with Tom over the boards for the henhouse?

Students read pp. 80-125 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension- pp. 80-125

- What happens on December 13th that frightens Lucia?
- What is Eileen's new job? How does she feel about it?
- What does Roseanne reveal to Katie and Lucia in the dinner-shed about her family?
- Who does Katie believe is responsible for causing the problems at home?
- What does Katie buy for herself in Thorp's?
- What does Lucia call her hen? What does Roseanne call hers?
- Why does Katie love Hilda so much? Why does she think that her mother would never let her have a cat or a dog?
- Where do Katie and her family go on Christmas Eve? Why do you think that Tom agreed to go?
- Who comforts Katie at church when she starts crying? Why is she surprised about this?
- What presents does Katie receive for Christmas?
- What does Brian reveal to Katie about his life in Wellington?
- Describe the man who comes around to see Tom. Why do you think that Katie's mother is suspicious of him? How does Tom react when Katie tells him that the man is there?
- Where does Tom tell Katie he has been when he turns up again? Why do



you think the rest of the family does not want to question him about his movements?

- Why do you think that Tom is ready to move on again? Where do you think he will go?
- What happens when the tramp returns to Katie's house? How does Tom react when Katie tells him the tramp has returned?
- What does Tom buy for Katie with his winnings from the races?
- What was the first overseas country that Tom visited? Where did he head to next? What exciting things happened to him on his journey?

Discussion

- Katie is a Catholic. She attends a Catholic school and goes to Church regularly. However, there are many times in the story when she is confused about God and why he lets bad things happen. Find some examples in the story where Katie questions God.
- Describe Katie's brother Tom. What is his relationship with his family like? How have his experiences shaped him as a person? Why do you think that he has so much difficulty communicating with people? Who do you think the tramp is and what does he want with Tom?

Students read pp. 129-155 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension – pp. 129-55

- Where was Katie when the earthquake hit? Describe her experience.
- What do Roseanne, Lucia, Sarah and Katie see as they head into town?
- What damage did the earthquake cause to Katie's house? Where do Katie, Eileen and Uncle Mick head? Why do they go there?
- Name the ship that was stranded in the earthquake. Why does Katie believe it was lucky they were there?
- Why does Uncle Mick find the experience of the earthquake so traumatic?
- How do Tom, Katie's mum and Eileen help out after the earthquake? Why does Katie have to go to Wellington? Who does she stay with there? Why do you think so many people were evacuated?
- Who died when the nurse's home collapsed?
- Who is the tramp that keeps hassling Tom? How does Tom know him?
- Who is Violet?



- Where was Tom going at night?
- How many people died in the earthquake in Napier and Hastings?
- Why does Katie's mum believe that in some ways Napier benefited from this disaster?
- What damage did the earthquake cause in Napier?
- How did the earthquake provide opportunities for Tom? What skills does he have that made him an asset to the town?
- When does Katie arrive home?
- What is Violet like? Who are her children and how old are they? What experiences has she had in her life?
- How does Tom deal with Norton?
- What decision does Katie make about her future at the end of the novel?

Discussion

- What immediate problems did the earthquake cause in Napier?
- How did Katie's experience with the earthquake affect her? Have her priorities changed? What do you think she has learned about family?
- Describe how the people of Napier came together to deal with the disaster. What sorts of things did the people of Napier do to help the injured? How would you feel if your home was destroyed?
- Do you agree with Katie's mother about the disaster being good for Napier's economy? Explain your answer.

Activities

Research - Complete a research assignment on either the Napier Earthquake or the Great Depression in New Zealand. Formulate questions to focus your research. Keep a log that records the research process. Present your findings in an essay, as an oral presentation or on a poster.

Speech - Research New Zealand's involvement in World War 1. Present the information that you have gathered to the rest of the class as a prepared speech. Use visual aides to reinforce your ideas.

Letter - Imagine that you are Tom Bourke. Write a letter to Katie explaining why you left, where you have been and the adventures that you had while you were away.



Radio Announcement - Imagine that you are a radio announcer who is reporting on the Napier earthquake. Record your news broadcast and play it to the rest of the class.

Newspaper Front Page - Design a newspaper front page for a Napier paper. Invent a name for the paper. Design a banner. Write a newspaper article about the Napier earthquake. Use the inverted pyramid style of writing and include the 5 W's and H. Also include a feature article and design some advertisements that are in keeping with the time that the disaster occurred. Think carefully about the layout of your front page. Remember that there should not be any empty space.

Poster - Design a poster advertising the novel. This poster should be suitable for display in your classroom or library.

Pamphlet - Design a pamphlet that would provide people who have experienced an earthquake with important survival information. It would be a good idea to contact your local Civil Defence team to give you some ideas.

Poem - Write a poem about the effects of the earthquake on the town of Napier.

Teacher Notes by Vicki Gyde