

Tales from the Swamp

Author: Kingi McKinnon

Text Type

Tales from the Swamp is a collection of eight short stories written by New Zealand author Kingi McKinnon. The stories range from ghostly horrors to slice of life tales that examine many aspects of Maori culture and life, both ancient and contemporary. The book contains a glossary to give definitions for the Maori words used in the stories.

Fast-moving, often humorous and highly relatable this collection of stories will appeal to readers aged 8+. Although most of the protagonists are male there are enough feisty female characters to keep female readers interested. The short story is a genre that will allow even the most reluctant reader to remain focussed. The longest story in this collection is 37 pages long, which most students should be able to read in a single sitting.

Sharing the Anthology

The notes for *Tales from the Swamp* contain a brief synopsis, pre-reading and post-reading activities for each story.

The Witch

Ten year-old Casper and twelve year-old Danny have gone to spy on the old woman who lives down the road from them. Danny is convinced that the old Maori lady is a witch who has in the past put Makutu on people who have wronged her. At first Casper is sceptical, but when he sees the strange old lady dressed all in black, smoking a pipe and with moko on her chin, he begins to suspect that Danny is right. After all he has never lied to him before.

When Danny suggests that he go into the lady's garden and steal some of the watermelon that are just rotting on the ground Casper's greed gets the better of him. All he has to do is wait for Danny to come back and the largest watermelon is all his. But Danny doesn't come back and when Casper goes to look for him he finds himself face to face with the terrifying woman in black. Later Casper comes down with a mystery illness and he begins to wonder if the witch has put a Makutu on him. And what has happened to Danny?

Pre-Reading Activities

- Do you believe in witches? Why are people so scared of them? What powers do they have?
- Are there any people who live in your town who are a bit unusual? What stories have you heard about them? Why do people fear or make fun of people who are a bit different?

- Have you ever believed a story that an older friend has told you that turned out not to be true? What was the story?
- Have you ever done something dishonest or been influenced to do something you wouldn't normally do by an older friend or relative? What was it and how did doing it make you feel?
- The title of this story is *The Witch*. Make a prediction about what will happen in this story.

Post-Reading Activities

- Who are the main characters in the story? Describe each of them.
- Why does Casper look up to Danny so much?
- What does Danny tell Casper about the old lady? Why does Casper believe him?
- How does Danny convince Casper to wait while he goes to steal the watermelon? Where do you think Danny disappears to?
- How does Casper feel when he comes face to face with the old lady? What does he do when he sees her?
- Why does Casper spend so many days in bed when he gets home? What does he think has happened to him?
- What does Casper find out about the old lady when he wakes up? How do his feelings about her change?
- What do Danny and Casper talk about when he wakes up? Why does Danny feel ashamed of himself?
- Write a paragraph explaining what you think happened to Danny when he disappeared while going for the watermelon.
- Write a paragraph explaining what you think the main message of the story is.

Hohepa's Goodbye

Hohepa's grandmother has just died. She raised him from a child and he was closer to her than anyone. This is why the family expect him to travel with them to the pa to say his final goodbye. But Hohepa doesn't feel able to attend the tangi; his grief is too deep. So he runs away from the marae and goes home to hide, unable to face the reality of his grandmother's death. His family returns to search for him and his Uncle Jonna, who has been close to him his whole life, talks to Hohepa – encouraging him to express his grief. Through talking to his beloved Uncle Hohepa reaches a better understanding of death, and the importance of saying goodbye.

Pre-Reading Activities

- Have you ever lost anyone close to you? How did it make you feel? How did you deal with your grief? How did the rest of your family cope with their feelings?
- Why is it so important to go to a loved one's funeral or tangi? What does this allow you to do?

- Are you close to a particular family member? What is it about this person that makes you able to confide in them? Why is it important for young people to have someone to talk to?

Post-Reading Activities

- Why doesn't Hohepa want to go to the tangi? What does he do when the family arrives at the marae? Where does he hide when he gets home?
- How do Hohepa's cousins react when they realise that he has been hiding in the woodbox? Why does Uncle Jonna send them away before he talks to Hohepa?
- Why does Hohepa find it so hard to express his feelings to Uncle Jonna initially? Why does Hohepa feel so close to his Uncle?
- What happened to Hohepa's grandmother? Why does Uncle Jonna believe that her death may have been "for the best"? What understanding does Hohepa finally reach after talking to his Uncle?
- When did Hohepa say goodbye to his grandmother?
- Why does having a good cry often make people feel much better about a situation? What does Uncle Jonna share with Hohepa after he has his cry?
- How does Hohepa feel when he gets back to the pa?
- Where will Hohepa live now that his grandmother is dead?
- Imagine that you are Hohepa. You have your diary with you when you run away from the marae. Write a diary entry about your thoughts and feelings about how you are feeling.
- Write a paragraph explaining what you think the author's message is. Use quotes and examples from the story to back up your ideas.
- Write a poem about a favourite relative or friend who has passed away.

Mud, Slush and Tuna

Roha lives with his mother, father, two younger sisters and two older brothers. His two brothers Mutu and Rewi enjoy going out torching for tuna, which Roha believes is really a pretext for being able to smoke and joke about without their parents finding out. The trouble is that Mutu and Rewi always drag Roha along to carry the sack and Roha hates it. He would much rather be sitting at home in the warm in front of the television set rather than traipsing outside in the cold through muddy paddocks and across barbed wire fences. To make matters worse Roha's brothers know that he is afraid of the dark; in fact it was them that made him that way with their scary stories about ghouls and zombies. Mutu and Rewi take every opportunity to frighten Roha which makes his evening even more miserable. Tonight Roha has no choice but to accompany his brothers on their adventure. He ends up cold, scared and sore, wishing more than anything to be able to go home and snuggle into his warm bed.

Mud, Slush and Tuna is a slice of life story that will appeal to anyone who has lived in a rural area and has older brothers and sisters who have a tendency to make fun of them because they are the youngest.

Pre-Reading Activities

- Do you have older brothers or sisters? Do they pick on you or make you do things that you don't want to do?
- Why do you think it is hard being the youngest sibling?
- Have you ever lived or been on a farm? What sort of activities can you do on a farm that you can't do in the city? Have you ever been eeling or tuna fishing? Did you enjoy it? Why/why not? Describe how you went about catching the fish.
- Based on the title of the short story make a prediction about what you think the story will be about.

Post-Reading Activities

- Who is the main character in the story? Who does he live with?
- Why is Roha so upset when he hears Mutu ask his mother if they have any candles?
- Why do Roha's brothers always drag him along when they go torching for tuna? How does Roha feel about going with them?
- How does Roha get separated from his brothers? Why is he so scared of the dark?
- What does Roha mean when he thinks "they have all the fun while I do all the dirty work"?
- How does Roha fall into the water? Why is it so hard for him to follow his brothers when they decide to move on?
- Why does Roha feel so miserable? How does he feel when the trio finally return home?
- Why does Roha have to get up so early the next morning?
- What is special or unique about Roha's life on the farm?
- Why doesn't Roha tell his brothers how he really feels about helping them?
- Have you had a similar experience to Roha with your brothers or sisters? If so, describe it.
- What do you think the author's message is?
- Create a storyboard that shows 8 important events that occur in this short story. Write a brief description of what is happening under each illustration.

Hiria's Headache

It's not fair. Its holiday time and Hiria's whanau is going to the beach. Most people would love to go away but not Hiria. She is twelve years-old and in love for the first time with Willie Manu. How will she manage a whole week away from him?

Things don't seem quite so bad when Hiria arrives at her Uncle Reg and Aunt May's house though. Her cousin Cecelia is there and more than happy to listen to her chatter on about Willie. Things get even better when another cousin Thomas turns up with his friend Levi. Levi's wavy black hair and sparkling green eyes instantly put all thoughts of Willie out of Hiria's head and soon Hiria is more than happy being at the beach. In fact, now she doesn't want to go home...

Pre-Reading Activities

- Have you ever been in love? How does it make you feel? What are the best parts of being in love? What are the worst? What are some of the ways that you can tell if someone likes you? What does it feel like to love someone who doesn't return your feelings?
- Do you think that it is possible for someone who is not yet a teenager to truly fall in love? Why/why not?
- Based on the title of the story make a prediction about what you think the story will be about.

Post-Reading Activities

- Who is the main character in the story? How old is she? Why doesn't she want to go to the beach with the rest of her whanau? How does she let her parents know that she is not very happy about going away?
- What is Hiria's brother's name? What does he tease her about?
- Who is the object of Hiria's affection?
- What kind of relationship do Hiria's parents have? Why is Hiria so surprised that they don't seem to understand how she feels?
- Who does Hiria's whanau stay with at the beach? What is Hiria's cousin's name? What does Hiria tell her about Willie?
- Do you believe that Hiria is really in love with Willie? Explain your answer.
- Who is Thomas? Who does he bring over to visit?
- How does Hiria feel when she sees Thomas' friend? What does her mother mean when she asks her father "was I ever that bad"?
- What happens on the night when Hiria feels like "all of her dreams come true"?
- Why doesn't Hiria want to come home?
- What does this story tell the reader about young love?
- Imagine that you are Hiria. Write a love poem to Levi.
- Write a letter to a friend telling them about this story and explaining why you think they should read it.

Chocolate Cake

It is Saturday and Paora and Tama have been sent by their mother to hunt for eggs with their cousin Matiu. If they manage to find enough eggs, mum will make them one of her delicious chocolate cakes. Paora is a couple of years younger than Tama and Matiu but the older boys like having him around because he gives them someone to boss. At first the boys have little luck. The

goose eggs that they find turn out to be rotten and are really only good for throwing at each other. The boys decide to go for a swim in the creek to get rid of the smell of rotten eggs and this is when they make an unexpected discovery. Wag, the boy's dog, leads them to an area beside the river that they have never explored before. Here they find an idyllic pond with floating lily pads surrounded by weeping willows. Moored at the side of the pond is an old boat which the boys find still floats. Paora, Tama and Matiu spend the rest of the afternoon playing around in the boat. Before they know it the sun is beginning to go down and the trio decide to explore the other side of the lagoon before they return home. This is when their luck changes. Wag helps them find a pheasant nest and some pukeko eggs. Perhaps the boys will get their chocolate cake after all!

Pre-Reading Activities

- Why do older boys often pick on younger ones? Why do you think young boys often look up to older boys and want to hang around with them even if they do boss them around?
- Why do you think kids like playing outside so much? What are your favourite outdoor activities? What sort of mischief do you think 3 young boys could get up to if they were sent out for the day to collect eggs?
- Where does your family get their eggs? Have you ever had to collect eggs in the wild?
- What differences do you think there would be between living in the city and living in the country in terms of how children grow up and the experiences that they would have? Where would you rather live and why?
- Why do you think this story is called *Chocolate Cake*?

Post-Reading Activities

- Why do the Paora, Tama and Matiu have to find eggs for their mother? Where does she tell them to look? What reward does mum offer them if they find enough eggs?
- Why do Tama and Matiu pick on Paora? Why do you think Paora continues to hang around with them?
- How do the boys find the wild duck's nest? Why don't they take the eggs home? What do they end up doing with the eggs?
- Why do the boys decide to take a swim?
- What are the boys doing when they come across the pond? Why is the scene "like an oasis"? Describe what the boys see there.
- What do the boys do to the boat before they get into it? What do they decide would make a perfect secret hideout?
- What kind of eggs do the boys find? Why doesn't Matiu get angry at Paora when he drops an egg? How do the boys get the eggs home safely?
- Why are Matiu's parents angry with the boys when they get home? How do the boys manage to get back into their good books?
- What does mum do to ensure that the eggs are fresh?
- Draw a map that shows all of the most important settings in the story.

- Complete a flow diagram that shows 10 important events that occur in the story.
- Write an alternative ending for the story.
- What do you think the main theme of the story is? Use quotes and evidence from the story to back up your ideas.

The Friday Frights

Hamuera and Philip are really excited. They hurry through their farm chores as quickly as they can so they can go into town. It is the day that the dairy factory sends their father the cheque for the cream. It only happens once a month and it means that mum can pay the bills, dad can go to the market and the boys can go to the movies as payment for helping out around the farm.

The movie playing tonight is called *The Android's revenge*. Hamuera is really looking forward to the movie but he is not looking forward to the walk back past the shop to the bus stop in the dark. Hamuera is afraid of the dark. This is mainly his brother Philip's fault because since Hamuera was old enough to walk he has filled his head with scary stories about demons, ghosts and monsters. Today Philip promised Hamuera that he wouldn't try and scare him on the way home. Hamuera doesn't really believe him but won't miss the movie for anything. When he gets on the bus and finds his best friend Raymond is there and going to the same movie he is incredibly glad that he went. That is until after the movie when he is faced with the prospect of walking past the graveyard. It doesn't take Philip long to distract Hamuera and slip away from him. Hamuera is terrified and takes off after his brother but has no chance of catching him; Philip is the fastest runner in the school. Will Hamuera make it home safely or has Philip gone too far this time?

Pre-Reading Activities

- What are you most afraid of and why? Do ghost and demons scare you? What about graveyards? What are some of the scariest stories you that have read or been told? What is your favourite scary movie?
- Do you have older brothers and sisters who are mean to you sometimes? What sorts of tricks have they played on you? Why do you think that some older siblings take pleasure in tormenting younger ones?
- If you could only go into town once a month what would you do there and why?
- Predict what the story is going to be about.

Post-Reading Activities

- Who are the main characters in the story? Why are they so eager to get through their chores?
- What movie do the boys plan to see? Why is Hamuera worried that they will be late? What does Philip tell their mother to ensure that they don't miss the bus?

- Why does Hamuera hate the dark so much? What part of the night is Hamuera really dreading? Why does Hamuera still go into town with Philip when he knows that his brother will try and scare him?
- What does Hamuera see on the way to the bus stop that gives him the creeps?
- Who does Hamuera see on the bus? Why is he so pleased to see him? Why doesn't Philip go to the movie?
- How does Philip manage to slip away from Hamuera? Why do you think he does this? How does Hamuera feel when he has to chase his brother?
- Why is Hamuera so pleased to see Philip despite the situation that he is in? Why does Philip tease him so much?
- What makes Hamuera change his mind about telling their father that Philip has been smoking?
- Imagine that it wasn't Philip who came and grabbed Hamuera by the road and rewrite the ending of the story.
- Write your own scary story. Use description and figurative language to create characters and build up tension and suspense.
- Write a letter to the author of the story explaining why you liked it.
- Write a paragraph explaining the theme of the story.

Grounded

Josephine's dad is sick and tired of telling her to pick her bike up off the driveway. This time he has had enough. Josephine is being punished. Her bike is being locked in the shed and from now on Josephine will have to walk everywhere – a prospect that she is not looking forward to one bit.

Not having a bike proves to be a real pain. Josephine can't seem to get anywhere on time. She is late to school and is so tired when she finally arrives at netball that she is only picked as a reserve. Josephine begs her father to let her have her bike back but he refuses. She knows that when he has made up his mind about something there is no point in arguing. Sick of being punished for being late Josephine decides to take matters into her own hands. She begins to get up early in the morning and get to school before everybody else. She starts running everywhere so that she is never late. Surprisingly she even begins to enjoy it and this positive attitude begins to flow into other aspects of her life such as keeping her room tidy and watching less television. Her netball coach even notices how fit she has become and offers her a place in the A team. Her father is so impressed with the change in her that he decides she can have her bike back. But with the school sports day coming up Josephine decides that it might be a good idea if her dad keeps the key to the shed for another few weeks...

Pre-Reading Activities

- Have you ever been grounded by your parents? What did you do and what was your punishment? Have your parents ever punished you by taking something away? What did they take and how did it affect you?

- What do you think is the best way for parents to discipline their children? Has any consequence that you have received from your parents taught you a valuable lesson? What did it teach you?
- This short story is called *Grounded*. What do you think the main character in the story did to get punished by her parents?

Post-Reading Activities

- Who is the main character in the story? What has she done to make her father angry? What does her father threaten to do to her as a punishment if she does it again?
- What does Josephine like doing after school?
- What does Josephine's father do with her bike? Do you believe that this is a fair punishment? Why/why not? How does Josephine initially feel about this punishment?
- What does Josephine find so annoying about not having a bike? Why does she only make the reserves in the netball team?
- Why does Josephine decide to do something about her situation? What does she begin to do? How does Josephine turn her punishment into a positive thing?
- Why doesn't Josephine want to take her bike back when her father offers it to her? What lesson do you think she has learnt from her punishment?

Mauri of the Swamp

Tuku Himiona loves going duck shooting in the swamp near his home. The swamp used to be a wonderful river that was surrounded by the old papakainga, communal living area, and was teeming with eels, whitebait and other fish. That was before the council came with their diggers, dredges and lorries. They said that they were making the river deeper so that the fish would breed more prolifically but it all went wrong. The whole course of the river changed and isolated all of the area where Tuku loves duck shooting, leaving it a swamp.

On this particular day Tuku is very pleased with himself. He has killed seven ducks and two pukeko. He has also made an interesting discovery. In the swampy ground he has discovered an ancient tiki. The pounamu body is large and the paua eyes seem strangely alive. When Tuku picks the tiki up it burns his hand. Despite this Tuku slips it into his pocket to take it home for further examination. The ancient spirits that dwell in the swamp try to warn Tuku to return the taonga to the swamp but he foolishly ignores their chants and returns home.

What Tuku doesn't realise is that he has broken an ancient tapu. The Mauri belongs in the swamp. It provides its life force and keeps it thriving. Without the Mauri the swamp will die. As soon as Tuku arrives home he is struck down by a mysterious illness. His parents, realising the seriousness of their son's condition, call for the doctor. But the pakeha doctor cannot offer any solutions. It is not until Koro arrives that the real source of Tuku's ailment is

revealed; he has mate moe – the Maori sickness. The only way that Tuku can recover is if he returns the Mauri to the swamp. But Tuku is already so ill. Will he have the strength to journey back to the swamp or is it already too late?

Pre-Reading Activities

- What does it mean if something is tapu? What can happen if tapu is broken? How can it be restored?
- Do you believe that objects can have special powers? Why/why not? The boy in this story removes a taonga from the swamp. What do you think the taonga is? What do you think will happen to the boy when he removes this object from the swamp?
- Use your library to find out the significance of past ancestors in Maori culture. What belief system do Maori people have about death and dying?
- Based on the title of the story make a prediction about what the story is going to be about.

Post-Reading Activities

- Who is the main character in the story? What does he enjoy doing? Why is the area that he is hunting in become a swamp?
- What mysterious object does Tuku find in the swamp? What happens to him when he picks it up? Why do you think he puts the object in his pocket? What would you have done in his position? Explain your answer. What does it mean when the author says that Tuku feels a “strange sense of foreboding”?
- Why does Tuku feel like the atmosphere changes when he stops at the top of the hill? What happens to him when he tries to go home with his sack? What do the voices tell him to do?
- What is Tuku’s brother’s name? Why does Tuku get angry with him?
- Why doesn’t Tuku eat dinner with the rest of his family? What does Tuku dream about that night? What does Tuku do to his mother when she tries to wake him? Why are Tuku’s parents so worried about him?
- Where does Manu send Tamati? What does he do when he gets there?
- Why do you think Tuku seems to be so much better when Doctor Milton comes to examine him? What happens when the doctor leaves?
- What does Old Matangi tell Manu is wrong with Tuku? Why can’t a pakeha doctor help him?
- Where has Tuku seen the woman in his dream before? What does she tell him to do?
- How does Old Matangi know that he has found the taonga when he touches the object in Tuku’s swanndri? What will happen to Tuku if the taonga is not returned to its rightful place?
- Why is it important that Tuku return the taonga himself? Why does this present a problem for his family? How do they solve it?
- Describe what happens when Tuku throws the tiki into the swamp.
- How do Tuku’s family know that he is getting better after he returns the tiki?

- Why does Manu think that his father has much to teach his sons? Why is it too late for him to learn about his ancestors?
- Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter. Write an article about Tuku's experience.
- Design a static image that depicts a main theme or idea from the story.
- Imagine that you are interviewing Tuku. What questions would you ask him and why?