

My Story: A New Song in the Land

The Writings of Atapo, Paihia, c 1840

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Synopsis

Atapo is only a very young girl when her tribe is defeated in battle. She is captured by the enemy and becomes their slave. Atapo is forced to work hard for the rival tribe and is too scared to run away because the penalty for attempting to escape is death. However, when an illness brought by the Pakeha strikes the village, Atapo is blamed by Uroko, the chief's senior wife, and she must flee or be killed. Deeply distressed by the death of her mother Atapo escapes to the mission station at Paihia. Atapo is a very bright girl and is extremely interested in learning. At the mission, Atapo is taught to read and write. She keeps a journal in which she details all of the events of her daily life, in addition to her thoughts and feelings about them. She also learns about her people and the threat that the Pakeha, who are eager to buy their land, pose to them.

A proposal is made to the Maori chiefs – sign the Treaty of Waitangi and the Queen will protect you and your land. Many chiefs agree but some refuse to sign the document. Against this backdrop Atapo continues to become educated and seeks desperately to reclaim her previous life as a chief's daughter. But the tribe she has escaped from still blame her for many deaths. They want revenge and intend to kill Atapo. Will God and the people who do his work be able to protect Atapo from her enemies, or will she meet the same fate as the rest of her tribe?

Text Type

A New Song in the Land is an interesting adventure story. It is set in New Zealand c 1840 and provides an accurate portrayal of how the Maori people of the Bay of Islands lived at this time. Young New Zealanders will find the historical details contained in the novel fascinating. The Treaty of Waitangi is the document that led to the birth of our nation and Atapo tells her story against the backdrop of the document being presented to the chiefs and the discussions and events surrounding the signing of the Treaty.

Atapo is a likeable heroine who shows perseverance, courage and spirit. She experiences enough adventures and trials to keep even the most reluctant reader focussed. The book is set out mainly in diary form and we are privy to Atapo's thoughts and feelings surrounding the events that she finds herself involved in. The novel contains some Maori words which are translated for the reader in the glossary at the start of the book.

Sharing the Novel

The novel can be covered in 4-shared sessions and 3 independent reading sessions. It has been divided up as follows: pp 9-20, 20-70, 71-145, 146-192. During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding. Have them discuss relationships between characters and the events that occur in the story. Have them identify the challenges that Atapo faces and how she deals with them. Encourage them to examine how the character of Atapo develops and changes throughout the course of the story. Students should familiarise themselves with the glossary at the start of the story.

Introducing the Text

Students study the cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What time period does the story cover? How do you know?
- Where is Paihia?
- What year was the Treaty of Waitangi signed? Discuss what you already know about the Treaty with a partner.
- Who is the main character in the story?
- What is a mission station? Why does Atapo go there?
- What does Atapo learn at the mission station?
- What do you think is meant by Atapo's destiny being "the guiding star of her people"?

Read the glossary at the start of the story.

Read the Historical Note (pp. 194-199) at the end of the story. In your books summarise the information contained here.

Teacher reads pp. 9-20 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension pp. 9-20

- Where have the tribe's warriors' gone?
- Where does Atapo see her father standing?
- What is Atapo supposed to do when she grows up?
- What does Marama say before she leaves the Kainga? What do you think this vision might mean?
- What happens to Atapo and the rest of her group before they reach their destination?
- What scene greets Atapo when she returns to the pa?
- What does Atapo learn about her mother at the pa?
- Where are Atapo and her mother taken? What is Atapo's role in the tribe?
- What is Atapo's mother's name? What is the name of the chief's senior wife? Who is Tama?

- Why does Uroko hate Atapo so much? Why won't Uroko's husband listen to her complaints about Kahu?
- Why does Kahu tell Atapo not to join in the dancing?

Discussion

- How do you think Atapo felt when she returned to the pa and found out that many of her family, including her father, were dead? Why do you think her life was spared?
- Describe Atapo's life with the enemy tribe. What is she expected to do? How does Uroko pose a threat to her? How has being a slave changed Atapo's life? How would her life have been different if she had remained in her own tribe?
- In what ways does Kahu show herself to be a wise woman? What advice does she give Atapo?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read pp. 20-70 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 20-70

- Why have the visitors come to the village?
- Who is Aringa and why doesn't he agree with the marriage?
- What is the name of the man Atapo was betrothed to when she was born?
- What information does Kotahi bring with him?
- What does Marama tell Atapo about her future? Why is Atapo so disturbed by the vision?
- Why have the Pakeha visitors come to the village? Why is the chief wary of them?
- What does "Mr Pregnant-belly" do that insults the tribe? How do the tribe react to the insult?
- What does the man's son say that saves his father's life?
- What does the young man give Tama? What other gifts do the pakeha give the tribe?
- What is wrong with Kahu? Why does the Tohunga tell Atapo that she must move her mother out of the house?
- Why does Marama insist that Atapo leave the village? Where does she tell her to go? Why does Marama believe that Atapo will be safe on her journey through the night?
- Describe Atapo's journey to the mission station.
- Who finds Atapo and takes her to the mission?
- Why is Atapo so astonished when Parata leads her through the village?
- How does Atapo deal with her grief over her mother's death? Why do you think the pakeha disapprove of this?
- What does Atapo mean when she says "Fill the basket of knowledge"?
- Describe Atapo's new dress. How does she feel about it?

- Why is Atapo so surprised when she learns that everyone at the mission eats together?
- How does Miria know that Atapo is the daughter of chiefs?
- Why does Parata decide to take Atapo to Paihia?
- Who does Atapo believe has come looking for her? Why does she believe that this person is a threat to her?
- Who is the missionary at Paihia? Who does Atapo live with there?

Discussion

- What Maori beliefs and customs are shown in the novel?
- What difficulties does Atapo have adapting to her new life at the mission? How is life at the mission different from life in the village? What aspects of her new life does she enjoy? What aspects of her old life does she miss the most?
- What do you think would have happened to Atapo if the people at the mission hadn't taken her in?
- Describe Atapo's character. What challenges does she face? What qualities does she exhibit? Why is she so eager to learn from the pakeha?

Students read pp. 71-145 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 71-145

- Why does Pari hope that the guests have already eaten? Why is Atapo surprised by this remark?
- Where have the pakeha visitors come from?
- Why do the pakeha in Kororareka behave so badly?
- Why does Atapo ask Mata if she will kill the girls who have run away?
- Why does Atapo believe that learning is her "duty"?
- Why does Mata try and deter Atapo from leaving the mission village?
- What worries does Atapo have for the people in her family? How do you think she feels being away from her tribe?
- Why is Atapo so driven to learn how to write? What else does she learn while living at the mission?
- Describe Atapo's first experience of Sunday church.
- What is the name of Atapo's admirer?
- Why does Pari snap at Atapo when she smiles at the sailors?
- What makes Atapo decide that she will not go to the shipping and the sailors?
- How old does Mata Heni think that Atapo must be?
- Why do you think that young girls who marry get "old before their time"?
- Describe what happens when Hukiki asks Te Wiremu for permission to marry Atapo.
- Why does Mata believe that Atapo is not ready for her own book? What does Pari suggest they give her instead?
- Name the ship that brings the letters to the mission.
- Why does Atapo consider herself to be a person of "wealth"?

- What does Ngawa say to Atapo that upsets her? How is Parata able to comfort her?
- Who offers to ask for news of Atapo's family? What information does he return with?
- Who comes in Muri's place?
- What does Atapo see in the water that makes her realise that the men in the boat have tricked her? How does she escape? Who does Atapo call for help when she fears she may be drowning? Who rescues her?
- Why does Tokia put a curse on Atapo?
- Why does Atapo want to be baptised?
- Explain how Mata deals with Tokia when he comes to claim Atapo.
- Why do you think that Atapo is obsessed with clothes?
- Why does Mrs Brooks visit the mission?
- Why does Tuari decide to take the position with Mrs Brooks?
- Who is Te Matangi? How does Atapo feel when she sees him?
- Why does Atapo go to Paihia? Who is "the great chief of the queen from across the sea"?
- Why does Rewiti forbid Te Matangi to marry Atapo? What does Te Matangi say that gives Atapo hope?
- What explanation does Tuari give to Atapo for why there are so many people at church?
- What story does Tuari tell the girls about Mrs Blue-hat? What other exciting news does she have for them?

Discussion

- Find examples of things that happen in the story that show the differences between the Maori culture and the culture of the pakeha.
- Describe the people who take Atapo in and look after her. Why do you think they show her such kindness?
- Many pakeha who came to New Zealand were interested in buying land. What did they often give Maori in exchange for land? How does the pakeha attitude towards land differ from the Maori attitude?
- How do you think Atapo could use the knowledge that she is learning at the mission to help her tribe?
- Predict what will happen to Atapo next.

Students read pp. 146-192 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 146-192

- Why is Atapo worried about going to Waitangi? What does Atapo promise Te Wiremu she will do at Waitangi?
- Why does Te Wiremu believe that the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi is important for the Maori people? How will the Treaty affect Atapo's life?
- What curse does Tokia put on Atapo at the meeting? Why is Atapo so adamant that her ancestors will save her?
- Who translates for the Governor?
- In what way does the Treaty protect the land of the Maori?

- Why do some chiefs disagree with the Treaty? What arguments are made by others to encourage them to sign?
- When was the Treaty of Waitangi signed?
- Why is Atapo happy that so many chiefs have signed the Treaty?
- Why do the guns on the Governor's ship fire 21 times?
- What gift does Mata give Atapo before her baptism?
- What news does Kotahi bring from Kainga? Why does this upset Atapo?
- Name the ship that brings government officials and more pakeha to New Zealand. Why are the pakeha so angry when they arrive?
- How does Atapo know that it is time to go home? What stops her from returning to her kin?
- How does Te Wiremu help gather more signatures for the Treaty?
- What skills does Atapo learn that will be helpful for her and her tribe?
- Why is Atapo unwilling to be Te Matangi's second wife?
- Who attacks Atapo on the beach? What words does he scream at her? Where does Atapo get the courage to turn and face her attacker?
- What does Mata give to Atapo the day that she leaves the mission?
- How does Atapo make her way back to her people?
- Who does Atapo see sitting by the fire? Why is she so surprised to see them? What are they doing there?
- What do the traders offer the Maori in exchange for their land? What does Okuru say to the people of Pitangi that convinces them to reconsider the pakeha's offer?
- Why is Atapo taking such a risk when she addresses Pitangi? What does she discover when she studies the agreement carefully?
- Why is Atapo an honoured guest at the kainga?
- What reservations does Atapo have about returning to her people?
- Why is Atapo so confused when Mahara gives her the cloak to wear?
- Why does Rewiti change his mind about Atapo?
- Describe Atapo's welcome back into her tribe. How do you think Atapo would have felt at this moment?

Discussion

- Describe the atmosphere in Waitangi in the days leading up to the signing of the Treaty. Why is Atapo so excited about the event? How does she feel on Wednesday 5th February as she is standing outside Mr Busby's house?
- How do the pakeha milling outside Mr Busby's house contrast with the Maori there? Find examples in the story that illustrate the pakeha's attitude towards the Maori.
- Not all of the chiefs sign the Treaty. What problems do you think this could cause in the future?
- Describe Pari's attitude towards Atapo. How does she treat her? Why do you think she feels this way about Atapo?
- How will Atapo's life back with her own people be different to life at the mission? Do you think that Atapo made the right choice returning to her own people? Explain your answer.

- What issues are raised in the story? Are any of these issues still contentious today? Why do you think this is?

Activities

Research – conduct a research assignment on the Treaty of Waitangi. Formulate open-ended questions to focus your research. Use a range of sources to gather your information. Present your findings on a poster, as a speech, or in a power point presentation.

Storyboard – design a storyboard that illustrates 10 significant events that happen in Atapo's life.

Essay – write a persuasive essay that explains the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi to New Zealand.

Diary Entry – imagine that you are Atapo. Write a diary entry for her one year after she returns to her people. Describe what has happened during that year and remember to include thoughts and feelings.

Presentation – learn what is contained in the Treaty of Waitangi document. Summarise the contents into 10 main points. Present these points on your own treaty document, which you design.

Letter – write a letter to a friend explaining why *A new song in the land* is an important book to read to learn about New Zealand history.

Newspaper Article – Write a newspaper article that describes the events of February 6th 1840 and explains the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi. Remember to write in the inverted pyramid style, where the important details are given in the first paragraphs. Include quotes from people involved.

Poem – write a poem about Atapo's life.

Poster – design a poster advertising *A New Song in the Land*. Your poster should be suitable for displaying in your school library.

Paragraph – Write a paragraph about an issue raised in the story and how it is dealt with in the text.