

Land of Promise – The Diary of William Donahue, Gravesend to Wellington, 1839-40

Author: Lorraine Orman

Synopsis

William Donahue lives in England with his mother, father, sisters Lucy and Sophie, and younger brother Charlie. That is until his father, inspired by the wonderful promises made by the New Zealand Company, decides that the whole family is going to immigrate to the fledgling colony of New Zealand. Will dreams of adventures in a strange and exotic land, but his father has other plans for him. He wants to open an emporium in the new colony where he and his son will work.

The family sets sail for New Zealand from Gravesend. The journey is to take some months and cover 12,000 miles. The conditions aboard the ship *Adelaide* are not good for the steerage passengers and the only thing that makes life bearable for Will and Sophie are the jobs that their father organises for them with the first class passengers. It is here that Will meets Mr Revans, who writes and publishes a paper. Will is immediately fascinated by the newspaper industry and decides that he wants Mr Revans to take him on as an apprentice when they arrive in New Zealand. Tragedy strikes for the Donahue family during the voyage when baby Lucy dies. This event sends Will's mother into a depression. Her state of mind is not improved when the family arrives in New Zealand to find that the picturesque parks and squares promised by the New Zealand Company are nothing but a fantasy.

The Donahues and the other settlers struggle to build up the town of Britannia, a task made even more difficult when England claims sovereignty over New Zealand and declares all land sales made by the New Zealand Company illegal. In order to learn the Maori language, Will befriends a Maori boy named Rowroo (Rauru). The boys manage to forge a friendship despite the conflict that exists between the Maori and the Pakeha settlers. The Maori people are angry because much of their useful land has been stolen by the new settlers. Conflict between the two groups continues to escalate until it seems inevitable that violence will ensue. Can

Will and Rowroo maintain their friendship and convince their families to settle the matter peacefully, or will violence and anger tear them apart?

Text Type

Land of Promise, The Diary of William Donahue, Gravesend to Wellington, 1839-40, is a fascinating insight into the life of a young boy who emigrates from England to New Zealand. The story is based on the life of William Donahue, who leaves his home and friends in England to embark on a treacherous voyage to New Zealand. Many suffer sickness during the voyage, which lasts months, and when the settlers finally arrive in New Zealand they find that the promises made to them by the New Zealand Company have not been kept.

The story is told in diary form. The reader is privy to all of Will's thoughts and feelings as he completes his voyage and struggles to settle in a foreign country. Will is an intelligent and thoughtful young man who enjoys adventure and yearns to work as a printer's apprentice, not as a shopkeeper as his father expects. Will is adaptable, resilient and hardworking.

Land of Promise provides readers with a fascinating insight into the challenges that early emigrants to New Zealand faced. The novel is based on a true story and provides historically accurate information about how New Zealand was first settled and the conflicts that occurred between Maori and Pakeha.

Land of Promise has wide appeal for readers of both genders and will fascinate students who take pleasure in reading true stories and enjoy history.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Historical Note (pp. 189-205), Author's Note and Chapter 1 (pp. 9-19), Chapters 2-6 (pp. 20-98) and Chapters 7-12 (pp. 99-187). Pages 9-98 cover the voyage on the Adelaide and pages 99-187 tell the story of Will's arrival and experiences in New Zealand.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel.

Have them read the historical note and carry out some library research before beginning the novel so that they understand the historical context of the story. Students should compare their lives today with William's in the 1800s. Encourage them to analyse William's character and explain how he is shaped by his experiences. Of particular interest is Will's relationship with his father, who wants him to follow in his footsteps and become a shopkeeper, and with Rowroo, a young Maori boy with whom Will forges a friendship, despite the conflict that exists between the British settlers and the Maori.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- To whom does the diary belong? What do you expect from a novel told in diary form?
- What time frame does the diary cover?
- Where is the narrator travelling to? Why do you think that the voyage is "devastating"?
- What does the narrator's father want him to do when they reach their destination?
- What is meant by the expression "pie in the sky"?
- What challenges and difficulties do you think the first settlers in New Zealand would have faced?
- Why are the Maori people angry with the new settlers?
- What important event in New Zealand history happens in 1840?

Students read the Historical Note (pp. 189-205) and answer the following questions:

- Who created the New Zealand Company? Who opposed the New Zealand Company's plans to settle New Zealand?
- Who was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of New Zealand? What year was the Treaty of Waitangi signed? What does "sovereignty" mean?
- Who was the leader of the expedition that journeyed to New Zealand aboard the *Tory*? Where did the party settle? How much land did Wakefield claim to have bought from the Maori people?

- How did he pay them? Why were these transactions invalid? Why did Wakefield's dealings with Maori cause so much conflict?
- Why was the voyage of the *Adelaide* so gruelling? Why were the new settlers disillusioned when they reached New Zealand?
 - What was Wellington originally called? When did it become the capital of New Zealand?

Teacher reads the author's note and Chapter 1 (pp. 9-19) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 9-19)

- Who is Will writing his diary for?
- Who are the members of Will's family?
- Why is Will's father so convinced that moving to New Zealand is a good idea? What does Pa dream of opening in New Zealand?
- How does Will feel about going to New Zealand? What about his sister Sophie?
- What is the name of the ship that the Donahue family will be sailing on? How long will the journey take?
- Describe the steerage compartment.

Discussion

- What challenges do you think William and his family will face during the voyage? What problems could be created by the poor conditions in which they will have to live?
- What do you think Pa has in store for Sophie and William?
- How would you feel if you were made to leave your home and travel to a faraway country?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 2-6 (pp. 20-98) independently before the next shared session

Comprehension Chapters 2-6 (pp. 20-98)

- How many cabin passengers are there on the *Adelaide*? How many steerage passengers? Why do you think that the New Zealand Company paid for the fares of many passengers?
- Describe Will's first few days aboard the ship. In what way does the weather affect the passengers and the progress of the ship?
- What proposal does Pa and the Surgeon-Superintendent put to Sophie and Will? Why are they so eager to take up the offer?
- Who is Will's new employer? Who is his companion? Describe the men.
- Who is Sophie's new employer? How did she come to be aboard the *Adelaide*? Why are some of the other passengers rude to her?
- How does Will feel about the majority of the cabin passengers?
- What does Mr Revans do for a job? Why is the poem published in his paper so amusing?
- How do the passengers aboard the *Adelaide* suffer during the storm? Why is Lucy's health deteriorating?
- What activities are organised on the ship to help keep passengers busy and entertained?
- Why does Charlie keep getting into trouble? Why does Will feel responsible for his younger brother? How does he save his brother's bacon?
- Why does Sophie feel so sorry for Miss di Oliveira? How does she try and make life more bearable for her?
- How does Charlie break his leg? Why does Will think that it is inevitable that something had to happen to his brother? Why does Will feel responsible for the accident?
- What does Fanny learn when she visits Charlie below deck? Why is her response to Charlie's explanation of his sign so surprising? What does she give Charlie as a parting gift?
- Why do the passengers rush up on deck when it starts raining?
- Why does Lucy die? How does Will deal with her death? How does his mother react? Why is she so happy when she hears that Mrs Riddell has given birth to a daughter?
- Why does Dr Edwards cause so much friction on the ship? Why does Mr Miller challenge him to a duel? What is Will's dad's opinion of Dr Edwards? Why does Will disagree with him so strongly?
- Why is Will so unsteady on his feet when he first arrives in Cape Town? What does he see when he arrives in town?
- Who pulls out of the duel? Why does Will think he did this?
- What does Will experience during his Colonial Explorers' expedition?

- Who asks Liocadia to marry him? Why does the pair decide to keep their betrothal secret?
- Why is Monday February 3rd a day of disasters?
- How do the passengers suffer during the storm?
- What fabulous idea comes to William when he talks to Francis Yates about his job as a compositor?
- Why does Will begin to feel sorry for Matilda?

Discussion

- How do the conditions of the cabin passengers contrast with the conditions of the steerage passengers? In what ways does Will benefit from his job as a companion?
- Describe the class system that exists aboard the *Adelaide*. Does such a system still exist today? Explain your answer.
- Describe William. What qualities and characteristics does he have? What is his relationship like with his parents? His brother Charlie? His sister Sophie? Find quotes and examples from the text to back up your ideas.
- What kind of man is Will's father? What attributes does he possess? Is he doing the best thing for his family? Why/why not? How does he feel about the "toffs"? What does he want Will to do when they reach New Zealand? How do you think he will react when Will tells him that he doesn't want to follow in his footsteps?
- Which characters in the story illustrate the old saying that you "can't judge a book by its cover"?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 7-12 (pp. 99-187) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 7-12 (pp. 99-187)

- Why is Captain Campbell surprised when he finds another ship anchored in Port Hardy? Where do both vessels set sail for?
- Describe what Will sees and experiences when he first arrives at Port Nicholson.
- Why are Will's family and the other settlers so disappointed when they arrive in New Zealand? Why is there disagreement about where Britannia should be built?

- Describe the settlers' initial encounters with local Maori. Why do you think that the Maori are so friendly and helpful? Why do Will and his family remain wary of them despite this?
- What event causes Sophie to burst into tears?
- To where do the majority of the settlers want to move the town? What are their reasons?
- How does Mr Revans react when Will asks him if he wants an apprentice? Why is Will so afraid to tell his father about the conversation?
- What does Will volunteer to do that convinces Mr Revans to take him on as an apprentice?
- How do the Maori at Thorndon react to the settlers? Why do you think that they are so wary of them?
- Why is Will's father having so much trouble selling his goods?
- Who does Will meet as he watches the ship from Sydney unload? Describe what he looks like. How does Will communicate with him?
- What warning does Will's father give about his new friend?
- Why do problems arise about the purchase of Thorndon Flat? How does Will's father propose that they deal with the problem?
- Why is Colonel Wakefield so upset when Captain Pearson escapes from prison?
- What advertisement is run in the second issue of *The New Zealand Gazette*? What does Sophie believe is the reason that her father's business is not going well?
- Why is Rowroo's father angry?
- Why are the settlers so worried about the document that Henry Williams is carrying around?
- How does the uncertainty about the future affect the members of the Donahue family?
- What prompts Colonel Wakefield to form a militia?
- Explain the two opposing camps that form when the Queen is officially announced as the sovereign of New Zealand.
- Why does Will take Matilda to visit his mother? How does Matilda's visit benefit Will's mum?
- What excellent news does Will's family receive on the 8th June?
- Why are Rowroo's father and the other local chiefs angry? What do some of the young warriors want to do about the situation? Why is Will worried that this conflict will ruin his friendship with Rowroo?

- When is the town plan ready? How is the land allotted? Why does Will's father have so much trouble locating his land? What further delays the process?
- Why does Rowroo describe the land that has been left for his people as "bad land"?
- Where does Hobson decide to establish the capital?
- Who helps Will's dad in the shop when Will is too busy?
- What happens when Mr Revans employs Maori labour to build his house? What does his reaction to the situation suggest about his character?
- What action is Rauru's cousin Kuru intent on?
- How does Will's father react when Will tells him that he doesn't want to work in the Emporium? Why doesn't Will's father trust Mr Revans?
- Why does Sophie believe that "everything is different here"? What does she want to do in Britannia?
- To where does Will's father want to move? How does the rest of the family feel about this? Why is Will's mother's reaction to this idea so surprising?
- What does Will's father do once the family has made the decision to stay in New Zealand?
- How does Will convince Mr Revans to formally take him on as an apprentice? Why is Will so worried when Mr Revans gives him his contract? Who shows the contract to Will's dad? What does he say to Will that causes him to run off?
- Who confronts Will when he wakes up in the Maori village? What has Will done to upset the Maori villagers? Who speaks to the angry mob on Will's behalf? What do you think would have happened if this person wasn't present?
- Why does Will's father decide to camp in the new house? What do Will and his father catch the Maori trying to do? Describe the encounter between Will, his father and the Maori. How does Will try to diffuse the situation? Who finally ends the standoff? How does Will's bravery change his father's opinion about him?
- Why is Rauru so adamant that "blood would be spilled one day"? Do you agree with him? Why/why not?
- Why does Will's father eventually sign the contract?
- How do the fortunes of Will and the rest of his family begin to improve after 8 months in New Zealand?
- What does Britannia get renamed? Why doesn't the town continue to grow peacefully?

Discussion

- What thoughts and feelings do you think Will had when he arrived in New Zealand and found out that the New Zealand Company had lied in their pamphlets? Describe the conditions in which he and his family were forced to live. If you were in Will's position, what do you think you would miss the most about home?
- Is it fair that Will's father expects him to follow in his footsteps rather than follow his own dream? Have you ever had a disagreement with your parents over your future? How did you resolve it?
- Explain how Pakehas view land. How is this different to how Maoris view it? Why is there so much conflict over the land sales? Give each side's point of view.
- Explain how Will has developed and changed throughout the story. What challenges does he face? How does he overcome them?
- What are the main ideas or messages in this story?

Activities

Plot - Construct a timeline that shows 15 important events that happen in Will's life in the order that they occur.

Oral book report - Present an oral book report to the class about *Land of Promise*. Include information about the plot, characters and themes. Include an extract from the novel in your presentation and remember to include your own opinion about the book.

Research - Conduct some research on the Treaty of Waitangi. Formulate 3 focussing questions to guide your research and gather your information from a range of oral, visual and written research. Keep a log of your research that explains the processes that you went through. Present your research as a poster or a report.

Static Image - Design a web page advertising *Land of Promise*. Include information about what happens in the story, the characters, the importance of setting and the themes. Combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas. You may wish to include links to other relevant sites

such as the Treaty of Waitangi, Colonel Wakefield or The New Zealand Company.

Research - Conduct some research on either William Hobson or William Wakefield. Present your information to the class in role as your chosen person.

Static Image - Design an alternate book cover and write a new blurb for *Land of Promise*. Explain why you chose to present your book cover the way you did.

Character - Write at least two paragraphs about William's character. Explain what strengths and weaknesses he has, what qualities and characteristics he exhibits, what motivates him and what his ambitions are. Use quotes and examples from the story to back up your ideas.

Drama - Choose an exciting part of the story and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Newspaper Front Page - Design a front page for the *New Zealand Gazette*. Include a banner headline, a feature article, a photograph, a news article and an advertisement.

Diary Entry - Rewrite a diary entry from Rauru's point of view.

Notes written by Vicki Williams