

**Along Came Greedy Cat: Exploring the “Ready to Read”
instructional reading series 1963-1988
as New Zealand children’s literature**

by

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Kay Hancock

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Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders for “The Wigwam” published in 1966 as part of the Methuen UK adaptation of the series. I would like to thank Methuen UK and Egmont Publishing UK for their assistance in this matter and would welcome any further information.

Abstract

Ready to Read is a graded instructional reading series that has been provided free-of-charge since 1963 by the New Zealand government for students in the first three years of school. It has therefore been a key part of the reading experiences of New Zealand children for over fifty years. There is a commonly held belief that there is a distinction between instructional reading materials (the materials that are used to help children learn to read) and children's literature – that the manipulation of text involved in developing instructional materials necessarily detracts from their literary appeal. The Ready to Read instructional reading series, however, was developed with the dual aims of helping children learn to read and *want* to read.

The series also reflects the vision of the Department of Education of “New Zealand materials for New Zealand students.” The Ready to Read materials were (and are) written and illustrated by New Zealanders, and trialled in New Zealand schools before publication, meaning that teachers and children have input into the materials. The materials include contributions by some of New Zealand's leading writers for children, including Margaret Mahy and Joy Cowley. They have a unique status in the history of New Zealand children's books as being among the first picture books for young New Zealand readers, and the very first that acknowledged Māori children as part of the reading audience. Moreover, as a “home-grown” reading series, seeking to reflect the interests and experiences of New Zealand children, the materials provide a unique insight into New Zealand society and changes in social attitudes, in particular the emergence of biculturalism.

While there is a significant body of research into the New Zealand *School Journal*, little attention has been paid to the Ready to Read materials (which are for younger readers). Price (2004) has written a short history of the early years of the Ready to Read series and McLachlan (1996) has investigated the visual representation of Māori in Ready to Read and the *School Journal*. This research seeks to fill this significant gap. This thesis explores how and why the series developed as it did from 1963-1988. It investigates the cultural and educational

contexts, the literary aspects of the materials, and the beliefs about children as readers that underpinned its development.

The “home-grown” nature of the Ready to Read materials, their literary qualities, their depiction of children’s lives, and the place of the series in the early reading experiences of New Zealand children make it indisputably a significant aspect of New Zealand children’s literature. It is hoped that this examination of the first twenty-five years of the Ready to Read series will be of interest to a wide audience, including educators, publishers, and researchers, and that it may serve as a starting point for further investigation. While this research is of immediate significance to a New Zealand audience, it also has international relevance in its description of an approach to the development of meaningful, engaging instructional texts for beginning readers that is unparalleled in the world.

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Chapter One

The Ready to Read series

This thesis traces the development of the first twenty-five years of the Ready to Read series, a graded instructional reading series provided free by the New Zealand government for students in the first three years of school. In New Zealand, because children generally start school when they turn five, this means children aged five to seven years old.¹ The series was established in 1963 with the dual aims of helping children learn to read, and to develop a love of reading. This was an approach to early reading materials (and by implication, to instruction) that was innovative in the 1960s and is still relatively uncommon outside of New Zealand today. The series was extensively revised in the 1980s, taking it in an even more literary direction, with the intention of producing books that “in appearance, appeal, and quality of story, [could] take their place alongside the best of children’s picture-story books” (Leckie 1984 45).² *Greedy Cat* (shown in Figure 1.1), a literary collaboration between writer Joy Cowley, and illustrator Robyn Belton, has been one of the enduring outcomes of this bold intention.

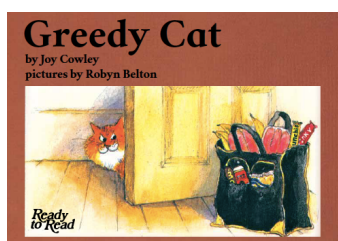


Figure 1.1. *Greedy Cat*.

¹ A note on style: In choosing not to use italics when referring to the 1963 Ready to Read series, I am following the current, preferred style of the Ministry of Education. At some point (during or shortly after the 1980s revision) the publication status of the Ready to Read books changed, with each book considered as a separate publication with its own ISBN. This is in contrast to the New Zealand *School Journal* and *Junior Journal* where each issue within the overall sequence has an ISSN rather than an ISBN.

² This thesis uses MLA reference style. Although this style does not require dates to be included in in-text citations, I have adopted the practice of adding a date for first mentions. The reason for this is that the publication date often has significance in regard to the Ready to Read materials.

My original intention in regard to this research had been to focus primarily on the literary aspects of these materials for beginning readers. As I investigated the context for the series, however, I discovered that when the series was established, there were almost no New Zealand picture books. This meant that the Ready to Read materials were, to a large extent, the first picture books for young New Zealand children that reflected their own lives. The free provision of the Ready to Read materials to schools means that they have been central to the early reading experiences of almost every New Zealand five-year-old over the past fifty years. Furthermore, the practice of trialling the materials before final publication meant that students and their teachers (and, at some points in the history of the series, members of the wider community) helped shape the materials.³ Accordingly, my focus changed to exploring the series as *New Zealand* children's literature. This study considers the social and cultural significance of this "home-grown" reading series, the first twenty-five years of which happen to span a period of profound changes in New Zealand society, particularly in regard to the emergence of New Zealand as a bicultural nation. I explore the social, literary, and educational contexts, the roles of the series developers (including writers and illustrators), the literary qualities of the materials, and the changes in thinking about children as readers. These aspects mark the Ready to Read series as a significant, but until now, overlooked aspect of New Zealand children's literature.

The explicit and implicit ideology behind the series with its focus on realistic, meaningful content, creates a high degree of overlap with childhood studies. The study of children's literature in an interdisciplinary context is reasonably common. Travisano (2000) defines childhood studies as

a multidisciplinary field that concerns itself with the nature of childhood experience and with ways cultures construct and have constructed childhoods. It thus explores, among many other considerations, the diverse ways that writers and other creative artists represent and have represented childhood. (22)

³ School-based trialling, although on a smaller scale than in earlier years, continues to be a fundamental principle of Ready to Read series development.

Christensen (2003) suggests that scholars should “have an awareness that children's literature, like literature in general, is created and shaped under certain conditions and exists within a certain reality influencing the final product” (230). Bader (1976) had expressed this idea rather more poetically:

A picture book is text, illustrations, total design, an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost, an experience for a child.

As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page.

On its own terms its possibilities are limitless. (1)

Whalen-Levitt (1980) also argues for the importance of considering the wider reading experience when considering children's literature. She states that “the term ‘children's literature’ refers less to a group of texts than to a range of literary experience. With the emphasis on literary experience rather than on the autonomy of texts, we are at liberty to include ‘first books’, for example, as a legitimate topic for study” (13). Other researchers and commentators also affirm the literary (and cultural) significance of early reading materials. As Betsy Hearne (1992) observes:

In the same way that the child shapes the adult, childhood literature stays with and affects the adult relationship with literature throughout a lifetime. Children's literature is as aesthetically and culturally important as adult literature, projecting patterns of language, narrative, and graphic imagery that are playfully simple and often rhythmic or repetitive — even musical — at the earliest stage. (17)

Miskec and Wannamaker (2016), too, acknowledge the literary and cultural significance of Early Readers (first books that children can read independently).⁴

⁴ While instructional reading books are commonly referred to as readers, particularly outside New Zealand, in this thesis, I use the term “readers” (in lower-case) to refer to children, not books. If using the term to refer to books, as Miscec and Wannamaker do here, I follow their example and use an initial capital letter.

They state that Early Readers are “for many younger readers, their first opportunity to engage with a work of literature on their own, to feel a sense of mastery over a text, to experience pleasure from the act of beginning to read independently. They shape – perhaps permanently – a child’s relationship with the written word” (1). Such statements affirm the significance of the Ready to Read materials as a focus for research.

To date, there has been no research into the literary aspects of the Ready to Read series. McLachlan (1996) perhaps comes closest with her investigation into the visual representation of Māori in New Zealand instructional reading materials. Price’s (2004) memoir *Ready to Read and the PM Books* is short, and O’Brien’s (2007) references to Ready to Read in *A Nest of Singing Birds* (his tribute to the New Zealand *School Journal*) are occasional.

The unique status of Ready to Read as a Government-funded set of literature-based reading materials tailored to the interests and experiences of New Zealand children, and the factors that have influenced the series’ development combine to provide a fertile area for study. This is also an area of great significance in what it reveals about the process of developing a reading series that not only helps children learn to read but includes children and their teachers in the development process. While this research is of immediate significance to a New Zealand audience, it also has international relevance in describing an approach to the development of meaningful, engaging instructional texts for beginning readers that is unparalleled.

Perceptions of instructional materials

The title of this thesis acknowledges the commonly held belief that there is a distinction between instructional reading materials (the materials that are used to help children learn to read) and children’s literature.⁵ Learning to read is often seen as a hurdle to be overcome before children are able to get on with “real reading”. Harvey Darton in *Children’s Books in England* (1932) defines children’s

⁵ It is timely here to explain my use of the term “instructional”. This is the terminology used by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to refer to its reading materials. Ready to Read is the “core instructional series” for students in years 1–3.

literature as “printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure, and not primarily to teach them, not solely to make them good, nor to keep them *profitably* quiet” (1, Darton’s italics). Darton’s distinction between reading for instruction and reading for pleasure is clear. C. S. Lewis (1973) makes a similar distinction in his essay, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children”: “I will not say that a good story for children could never be written by someone in the Ministry of Education, for all things are possible. But I should lay very long odds against it.” (239).⁶ This study will, I believe, demonstrate that it is indeed possible for a Ministry of Education to provide “good stories” for children.

For many years, New Zealand educators, researchers, and policy makers have shared a view of the importance of becoming a reader – someone who not only *can* read but who *wants* to read – and of the need for instructional materials that support this. In 1939 the Department of Education established its own publishing branch (the School Publications Branch) to ensure that students would have high quality, engaging, and relevant instructional materials.⁷ This commitment was also clearly articulated in Department of Education publications. In the introduction to a UNESCO report describing the work of the New Zealand School Publications Branch (Wells 1957) Clarence Beeby, Director of Education 1940-60, wrote:

In a school book a small child from a barren home may make his first contact with literature and the arts, and his first contact, too, with minds that are trying to say something to him with sincerity and skill and with no hint of condescension. No effort of ours can be too great if we are to meet the test. (7)

⁶ Lewis’s essay was published in *Horn Book Magazine* in October 1963 and republished in Haviland (1973).

⁷ The School Publications Branch remained part of the Department until 1993 when, as part of Government education reforms, the Department was restructured and renamed as the Ministry of Education. School publishing was devolved to Learning Media, a Crown-owned company. Learning Media closed in 2013 and, since 2014, Lift Education has been publishing the Ready to Read series on contract to the Ministry. The materials remain free to schools.

The Ready to Read series is built on the understanding that reading is a process of constructing meaning, and on the conviction that reading is enjoyable. *Suggestions for Teaching English in the Primary School* (1961), a bulletin produced by the Department of Education to support the 1961 language syllabus, included a section entitled “Learning to Want to Read.” Within this section is the statement:

At all levels the ability to read is more than being able to recognise words. It is also the capacity to respond with imagination and with appropriate feeling to the experiences books can give. The essence of teaching reading, therefore, is to create the need and the desire to read, and attention must be paid to this at all levels of education. (12)

The bulletin described the Ready to Read series, which was under development at the time, as having been devised “with the idea of making the best of both worlds – the world of interest and excitement and the world of ‘method’ where children are taught to master reading skills through a carefully planned text” (14). These attitudes align closely with the observations of Bettelheim and Zelan (1982):

If we wish to induce children to become literate persons, our teaching methods should be in accordance with the richness of the child’s spoken vocabulary, his intelligence, his natural curiosity, his eagerness to learn new things, his wish to develop his mind and his comprehension of the world – in short, by making reading an activity of intrinsic interest. (30)

What are needed are beginning texts that fascinate children, and convince them reading both is delightful and helps one to gain a better understanding of oneself and others – in short, of the world we live in, and of how to live in it. To achieve this, primary texts should stimulate and enrich the child’s imagination, as fairy tales do, and should develop the child’s literary sensitivities, as good poems are apt to do. (263)

It is common practice for children to learn to read with graded instructional materials. As C. S. Lewis implies, however, in the passage quoted previously, the

manipulation of text in order to control text difficulty often results in a loss of literary quality and appeal. Bettelheim and Zelan strongly criticise United States basal readers, stating that the simplification of vocabulary (by reducing the overall number of words and repeating words frequently), and the omission of material that might prove controversial produce materials that are bland and lacking in meaning, and therefore of limited appeal to students. They observe that “[a] child who is made to read: ‘Nan had a pad. Nan had a tan pad. Dan ran. Dan ran to the pad ...’ and worse nonsense, does not receive the impression that he is being guided toward becoming literate, because what he is being made to read is obviously not literature” (6-7).

Hearne, too, contrasts the use of basal readers with the rich literary experiences (oral and written) that many children have before starting school:

To risk losing literature as a participatory activity, to backpaddle from a hard-won fluency with narrative language to phonetic decoding of what suddenly seems babble, and to be positioned in a pass-fail relationship with books as the potential cause of failure, puts enormous strain on the relationship between child and book. It is at this strategic juncture that we often hit children with the dullest, most didactically contrived, purposive but profoundly purposeless literature: the textbook basal reading series. Basal readers are used in virtually every educational system despite the fact that most of these primers are narratively unimaginative, visually, vapid, and emotionally empty. We try to teach literacy through a form that conveys the opposite of everything we believe literature to be. (26)

Hoffman and Patterson (2002) studied the impact on reader engagement of the use of basal readers compared with literary texts in Texas schools. State education policy in Texas had changed from mandating basal-type readers (1987) to literary works (1993) and back to basal readers in 2000. The researchers analysed materials from each time period, using measures of language complexity (the use of words with regular letter-sound patterns, numbers of words, and frequency of repetition), accessibility (the contextual support offered by surrounding words), and engaging qualities, which they

described as “qualities of the text that are interesting, appealing, relevant, and exciting to the reader”(285).⁸ As with Bettelheim and Zelan, Hoffman and Patterson found that the control of vocabulary (in regard to reduction and simplification) had a negative effect on the appeal of the materials for students.

From my own involvement with the Ready to Read series, I am well aware there is a fine balance between controlling the level of text difficulty and providing reading materials that engage readers. Nevertheless, my contention, as I shall demonstrate in this thesis, is that this distinction between reading for pleasure and instructional reading is not inevitable. The Ready to Read series shows that it is possible to create early reading materials with literary features that help children learn to read and *want* to read.

What readers do

The concept of interaction between readers and texts is central to this thesis. Literary theorist Wolfgang Iser (*The Implied Reader* 1974) describes reading as an interaction between the reader and the text, with texts having “gaps” or “indeterminate elements” that require the “creative participation” of the reader to fill (275). Iser suggests that a literary text “must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader’s imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative” (275). He introduces the concept of the “implied reader” (xii), the reader the author has in mind when creating a text that allows for “negotiation of insight” (57). Iser’s account applies equally to the reading experiences of beginning readers, though often requiring the mediation of an adult in the first instance. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) emphasises the personal and unique aspect of the reading experience. She describes each reading of a text as a unique transaction between the reader and the text, with the reader’s response

⁸ Although it is difficult to measure a subjective aspect such as “engaging qualities”, the researchers developed a measurement tool that took into account three aspects (content, language, and design). They used a combination of rubrics, anchor texts, and researcher training to create a coding measure that was shown to have a high level of reliability, and that was validated when crosschecked with student preferences. I explore “engaging qualities” in subsequent chapters.

influenced by such aspects as the reader's prior experiences (including reading experiences) and their purpose for reading.

Aidan Chambers (1985) applies Iser's concept of the implied reader to works for children, observing that "all literature is a form of communication" with the writer requiring a reader "to complete the work" (34-35). Educator and literary scholar, Margaret Meek uses a similar analogy in her 1988 booklet, *How texts teach what readers learn*: "To learn to read a book, as distinct from simply recognizing the words on the page, a young reader has to become both the teller (picking up the author's view and voice) and the told (the recipient of the story, the interpreter)" (10). Benton and Fox (2006) recognise the communal experience of reading, describing the "literature classroom" as "a place where pupils may gain from others' responses while preserving their uniqueness as readers" (130).⁹ Their views reflect those of Rosenblatt in their acknowledgment that

what the reader brings to a story is as important as what the text offers in the sense that we fit the reading of a new story into the blend of our literary and life experiences to date, drawing upon our knowledge of other fictions as well as upon analogies in the primary world, in order to make our own, unique meaning. (129)

Reading processing theory

There is a great deal of overlap in the fields of reader response criticism and educational theory in regard to descriptions of what readers do. Reading processing theory, as expounded by Clay (1972), also centres on the interaction between reader and text. Clay describes readers as drawing on multiple sources of information (such as print, illustrations, their own prior knowledge including knowledge of how language works, and their expectations of the text) to create meaning and that reading is a continual process of sampling, predicting, checking, repredicting, and so on. As readers read, they develop a reading

⁹ This article, "What happens when we read stories?" was first published in 1985 and republished in Hunt (2006).

processing system that becomes self-extending. In other words, they learn to read by reading.¹⁰

Clay's description of what young readers do is very similar to Iser's description of adult readers: "We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfilment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation" (288). Similar crossovers between literary criticism and educational theory can be found in the writings of psycholinguist and educational researcher Frank Smith, especially in regard to the importance of readers interacting with text and the belief that children learn to read by reading. Smith (1978) describes reading as a process of readers "asking questions of printed text" and getting them answered (105). Meek (*Learning to Read* 1982) refers to "the way by which readers are made, namely by reading books and enjoying them" (9). She goes on to describe reading as "far more than the retrieval of information from a collection of printed records. It is the active encounter of one mind and one imagination with another" (10-11). If children's first encounters with school reading are texts that prioritise such aspects as letter-sound knowledge or word identification instead of meaning (as in "Nan had a pad" and so on) they may never reach this point.

Implications for instructional reading materials

The overlap between the fields of reader response criticism and educational theory in regard to what readers do has significant implications for the creation of instructional reading materials. Editors must consider how best to control the level of text difficulty while retaining the appeal of the materials for readers. Interestingly, there are some aspects of the simplification of instructional texts that are not dissimilar to the techniques used by writers of literary texts for children. The relatively restricted vocabulary, high level of repetition, and close picture-text match of Ready to Read books for beginning readers are the same aspects that help make picture books such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?* by Bill Martin Junior (1967), *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1969), and *Mr Gumpy's Outing* by John Burningham (1970), so enticing. The

¹⁰ Assuming, of course, that they are reading texts that are meaningful.

manipulation of text to convey meaning using words that are accessible to beginning readers can unintentionally create patterns and rhythms, while the need for concision and brevity creates “gaps” for readers to fill. Jill Paton Walsh (1977) refers to the literary effect created in children’s books by the need to pare back the detail, discerning within children’s books “an emotional obliqueness, an indirection of approach, which like elision and partial statement in poetry is often a source of aesthetic power” (193). Hearne finds a similar “paring back” of detail in folktales (traditional literary texts) and children’s books. She notes that they “have in common compressed structure and selective detail. Every word or line counts in a concentrated form shaped to withstand repetition” (18). As I will show, these comments apply equally to well-constructed instructional reading materials.

A brief history of the Ready to Read series 1963-88¹¹

Since 1907, the New Zealand Department of Education has been publishing instructional reading materials and providing them free to schools, beginning with the *School Journal* for students in the middle and senior years of primary school. The provision of free instructional materials recognises the right of children to free education (established by New Zealand’s Education Act of 1877) and the practical considerations of ensuring equitable access to instructional materials for all children. As already noted, it was in 1939 that the Department’s publishing function was expanded to form the School Publications Branch with the particular purpose of producing materials (in all curriculum areas) that were engaging and relevant, reflecting students’ lives as New Zealanders. C. E. Beeby was pivotal in developing this vision of New Zealand materials for New Zealand students. In Beeby’s words:

Good educational theory and our new sense of nationhood both demanded that we should begin the child’s education from his own world immediately surrounding him. And that world was New Zealand, where the sun shines from the north and Christmas Day is in summer, where the farm looms larger than the factory, whose flora and fauna are foreign to the European

¹¹ For an overview of the series from 1963–2013 see Hancock (2014).

textbook writer, where a new history began in 1776, where men and women whose cultural roots lie in the Old World yet feel a little differently about life from those who remained there.
(Wells 6)

The Ready to Read series, intended for students in the first three years of school, was added to the School Publications suite of materials in 1963. The series provided meaningful stories for children to read and enjoy, a dramatic contrast to the contrived texts used previously, blurring the perceived boundaries between instructional materials and recreational reading materials.

The 1963 series was popular and successful but gradually, with the passage of time, was felt to have become outdated. As Helen May (2011) notes, “Viscount planes no longer existed, fathers did not wear formal felt hats, mothers did not always wear aprons and cars had changed shape” (181). Other publishers were beginning to publish materials with more variety (and appeal) in content, style, and format. A national evaluation of the series in 1975 resulted in a series of recommendations for change. The years 1982 to 1988 saw the replacement or revision of most of the original series to form a much more varied collection of materials, both in regard to the types of texts it included and the diversity of lifestyles it represented.

The revised series retained the founding principles from the original series (to help children learn to read and to develop a love of reading) but went much further in incorporating the features of commercial picture books, including literary language and a much more prominent role for illustrations and book design, greatly increasing the opportunities for children to behave like “real” readers.

The 1985 handbook that accompanied the revised materials, *Reading in Junior Classes*, listed a set of underpinning principles for reading instruction that clearly align with the ideas of the theorists and critics cited earlier in this chapter.¹² These principles included the following:

¹² There have been several changes in terminology since 1963. For the sake of consistency I have chosen to use the term junior classes rather than infant classes or

Reading programmes should be child centred.

Reading for meaning is paramount.

Reading must always be rewarding.

Children learn to read by reading,

Children learn best on books that have meaning and are
rewarding. (9)

They continue to underpin the series to this day.

The parameters of this research

In this research, I focus on two time periods: 1963, when the series was first established, and the 1980s, when it was significantly revised. I limit the research to the first twenty-five years of the series for several reasons. The first is that 1988 marks the end of the major revision of the series.¹³ The second is that 1989 was when New Zealand's Education Act was passed, which ultimately led to the restructure of the Department of Education and of the publishing processes for the Ready to Read series.

I focus in particular on the role of the series developers. These are the editors, designers, and officers within the New Zealand Department of Education who were responsible for making decisions about the series. This is a departure from the more usual practice in studies of children's literature of focusing on the writers and illustrators of the materials. I do, however, examine in some detail the contribution of two key writers for the series, Joy Cowley and Margaret Mahy.

The parameters for the term "children" within this research are the intended audience for the Ready to Read instructional materials, children aged five to seven years, attending New Zealand schools. Accordingly, commercially

primers in this thesis (except where I am citing original documents). By junior classes, I mean students in the first three years of school.

¹³ It is clear from Department of Education communications to schools over the period of the revision that the process took far longer than expected. Although *Reading in Junior Classes* refers to 1985 as the end of the process (7), the intense period of new publishing continued until 1988 with the publication of *Dog Talk*, the last of the seven new miscellanies.

published picture books, intended for children of this approximate age range and commonly available in New Zealand junior school classrooms and school libraries over the time period, are the works used for the purposes of comparison.

A note on methodology and materials

While anchored in the Ready to Read materials, this research also draws on primary and secondary source material across a wide time period, including a UK adaptation of the 1963 series. Difficulties in accessing source materials have highlighted the urgency of this research in raising awareness of the literary and educational significance of the Ready to Read series. During the course of my research, the Learning Media reference library and Victoria University's W J Scott education library have closed, resulting in the culling and dispersal of relevant materials. Thankfully, I was on hand to collect some of these, to add to those I had kept from my own teaching days, and to others generously lent to me by colleagues. Some of the documents associated with the 1980s revision of the Ready to Read series (meeting minutes and planning documents) were "rescued" during an office cleanout. I have managed to find some materials in secondhand book shops, and some, in particular the Our Group books and some Department of Education handbooks, have required trips to the New Zealand National Library. To investigate the UK adaptation of the series, I visited the British Library. I hope that by drawing attention to the historical, educational, and literary significance of the research materials, this thesis will help smooth the path for future researchers.¹⁴

¹⁴ It has been pleasing to discover that all copies of *National Education*, the newsletter of the New Zealand Educational Institute have now been digitised and are available online. An outcome of my own research has been to have digitised copies of some of the 1963 Ready to Read materials made available as part of the New Zealand Electronic Text Collection. The link is <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-readytoread.html>.

In summary

The Ready to Read series occupies an important place in New Zealand's literary heritage. The "home-grown" nature of the materials, their literary qualities, their depiction of children's lives, and the place of the series in the early reading experiences of New Zealand children make it indisputably a significant aspect of New Zealand children's literature. The series has evolved considerably since 1963, to become an extensive and engaging collection of writing and illustration, featuring the work of many well-known New Zealand writers and artists, and reflecting the interests and experiences of New Zealand students. The materials provide fascinating insights into New Zealand's development as a bicultural society and changing ideas about childhood and gender roles.

As someone who has been involved with the Ready to Read series for over thirty years (as a classroom teacher, series editor, and, now, series literacy consultant), it seems to me that a focus on these materials is well overdue. Not only has the literary and historical significance of the series been overlooked, but also its current significance in helping children learn to read. While the series continues to be provided free to schools, changes in the education sector since 1988, particularly in regard to the provision of professional development for teachers, have meant that awareness of the series and the shared understandings that underpinned it have decreased significantly. (I discuss these aspects further in Chapter Twelve.)

This thesis explores how and why the series developed as it did from 1963-1988. It investigates the series' cultural and educational contexts, its literary aspects, and the beliefs about children as readers and as young New Zealanders that underpinned its development. In particular, I have sought to clarify: (i) the literary features of commercially published picture books; (ii) the extent to which these features are apparent in the 1963 and 1980s Ready to Read materials; and (iii) the ways in which the Ready to Read series reflects or constructs ideas about New Zealand children and their lives.

Chapter Two is intended as a foundation for what follows. Broad in scope, it explores characteristics of children's literature, using some classic picture books as examples. In order to establish a basis for comparison with the Ready to Read

materials, it also describes the New Zealand literary context for the series. Chapter Three describes how and why the series was established, Chapter Four discusses the literary aspects of the 1963 materials, and Chapter Five explores how the materials portray the world of New Zealand children. Chapters Six to Ten focus on the 1980s materials. Chapter Six describes the changes in the educational, social, and literary contexts that led to the subsequent revision of the series, and Chapters Seven to Nine explore the literary aspects of the 1980s materials, with a particular focus on the writing of Joy Cowley and Margaret Mahy. Chapters Ten and Eleven focus on social and cultural aspects, including the portrayal of New Zealand children's "own worlds" in the later materials and the move towards biculturalism within the first twenty-five years of the series.

Chapter Two

Discussing picture books

This chapter describes some typical features of picture books, clarifying the basis for comparison with the Ready to Read instructional materials. It also describes the literary context for young New Zealand children in terms of the picture books recommended for classroom reading, and the New Zealand picture books available when the Ready to Read series was being developed. Of particular interest, as we shall see, is the absence of any overlap between these two categories.

I begin with a discussion of some of the generally agreed characteristics of children's literature and the opportunities these provide for "creative participation" by readers. I then move onto a more detailed exploration of these features in five "classic" picture books, those that in Lukens' words "have worn well, attracting readers from one generation to the next" (1995 28). I have chosen as my examples picture books published prior to 1963. Significantly, in light of the comparison I wish to make with the Ready to Read materials, three of the books I discuss fall within the category of "Early Readers." First-published in the United States in the late 1950s, Early Readers are books with high-interest, engaging stories designed for newly independent readers to read for themselves. The three I discuss here are *Little Bear* (1957), an "I Can Read" book by Else Holmelund-Minarik, illustrated by Maurice Sendak; *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), a "Beginner Book" written and illustrated by Dr Seuss; and *Are You My Mother?* (1960), a Beginner Book written and illustrated by P. D. Eastman. My two other examples are: *Harry the Dirty Dog* (1956) by Gene Zion, illustrated by Margaret Bloy Graham, and *Lucy and Tom's Day* (1960), written and illustrated by Shirley Hughes. While *Lucy and Tom's Day*, Hughes' first picture book, is perhaps not as well-known today as my other four examples or, indeed, as Hughes' later works, it qualifies for inclusion partly because it is the only book by Hughes that was published before 1963, partly as an example of a particular narrative style, and partly for its realistic setting and human characters.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of other books listed in the series handbook as being recommended for classroom reading and a summary of New Zealand picture book publishing in this period.

Characteristics of books for children

Although picture books and other works for children are as notable for their differences as for their similarities, it is possible to identify a loosely related set of common characteristics that distinguish works for children from works for adults. Broadly, these characteristics are their relative simplicity both in content (acknowledging the narrower life experiences of a young audience) and language, their psychological or emotional focus, and their aesthetic features.

Lukens describes stories for children (including, but not confined to picture books) in contrast to those for adults as being “more directly told, with fewer digressions and more obvious relationships between characters and actions, or between characters themselves” (7). Certainly, children’s picture books are shorter than adult books, are often humorous and lighthearted, tend to have a clear focus and a straightforward structure, and use less sophisticated language. McDowell (1973) suggests that children’s books “tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection” (51). The illustrations in picture books, in addition to providing visual impact, play a crucial role in helping to convey information, such as character and setting and in creating tone, making “the verbal visible” (Lukens 202).

Narratives for children tend to follow a clearly linked series of events, often focused around a central conflict or problem. Crago, in a 1985 article, “The Roots of Response”, suggests the importance of “an underlying narrative structure that is easily grasped in terms of paired opposites (harm done/harm righted; victim stolen/victim returned etc)” and of characters with complementary, contrasting roles, for example, a hero/protagonist and a villain/antagonist (103). While Crago’s comments imply a narrative structure of opposing ideas, Nikolajeva (2012) refers to an alternative type of narrative structure, “middle narrative”, depicting “a chain of episodes with a vague temporal order and without any

causal connections at all ... for instance, a child engaged in everyday activities and games” (30). While I agree that “middle narrative” is relatively common in children’s books, I would argue that they do, in fact, have “causal connections”. Rather than each event necessarily bringing about the next as in a conventional narrative, events are linked by the overall theme (such as what children did at the beach or what children do every day).

Both types of narrative in picture books provide a clear pathway for the young reader to follow and, often, to anticipate. McDowell considers there is “a certain assurance to be found, and also a certain necessary aesthetically pleasing sense of the predictability (as in music) in meeting a story that runs on predictable lines” (58). Bellorin and Silva-Díaz (2012) in their discussion of surprise endings (another common feature of picture books), note the importance of expectation (as well as surprise) in helping inexperienced readers learn about literature. They state that children “become aware of the fact that elements in the text and pictures are not there casually” but are providing “hints and clues” for them to recognise and put together (117-18). Often the structure of a story for young readers is further “signposted” through the repetition of similar sentence structures to describe a series of similar events.

Usually, the protagonist of a story is a child or childlike character, someone with whom the child reader can identify. Tabbert and Wardetzky (1995) note that in order to be accessible to a reader, “a hero or heroine must share some traits with an ordinary reader, but in order to be attractive, there must also be a difference that makes the reader either look up admiringly to or look down sympathetically at the central figure” (4).

Crago identifies the importance of a “central situation” closely linked to “a central emotional issue for the child”, most likely “some variant of the relationship between themselves (as small, vulnerable people) and a parent or parent-figure (perceived as a large powerful person who may be either loving or rejecting, or, most usually, both)” (103). Crucial to this is the reassurance of a happy ending. While stories may include sad, scary, or disconcerting content, perils are dealt with, problems are solved, loving relationships are restored,

questions are answered, and stories end with a sense of reassurance. McDowell refers to children's stories having a "clear-cut moral schematism" (51) with children feeling that there is a benign power keeping them safe and that Good will prevail and Evil will be punished" (54). Yet there are also instances, sometimes didactic but sometimes tongue-in-cheek, where child protagonists come to unfortunate ends. I am thinking here of the stories of Struwwelpeter or Belloc's *Cautionary Tales*.¹⁵

The language in picture books, as well as accentuating patterns within the narrative (as mentioned above) is often crafted to create aesthetic impact and draw the reader in. Hearne (1992) notes that folktales and children's books "have in common compressed structure and selective detail. Every word or line counts in a concentrated form shaped to withstand repetition" (18). In *Spiritus Mundi* (1976), Northrop Frye discusses how the language of "charms" (language imbued with "music, sound and rhythm" (123)) is designed to lull or enchant the reader. With young readers, however, the full aural impact is likely to require the mediation of an adult on the initial reading.

Opportunities for "creative participation"

Iser (*The Implied Reader* 1974) states that "reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative" and that a literary text "must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself" (275). Hunt (1984), too, notes the importance of the connections between readers and texts, suggesting that "rather than saying 'better/worse' or 'suitable/unsuitable', criticism should say 'this text has certain potentials for interaction, certain possibilities for meaning'" (194). Crago expresses a similar view, suggesting that "the richer and more ambiguous the text, the more wide-ranging and interesting the evoked response" (102).

Iser refers to the importance of gaps within literary texts that require the "creative participation" of the reader to fill (275), stating "with a literary text we

¹⁵ Katharine Slater explores the appeal of scary stories in her chapter "'I think these chapters are not real': *In a Dark, Dark Room* and the Horrors of Early Reading" (Miskec and Wannamaker 2016).

can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imaginations" (283). While Iser is referring here to works for adults, if we change the word "unwritten" to "unstated", this comment applies equally to the reading of picture books.

While "gaps" for readers may be deliberately crafted by authors and illustrators, the need to tell stories "more directly" (Lukens 7) may also have this effect. For very young children, "filling gaps" may be simple, as in identifying a character in an illustration, or more complex, as in predicting an event or forming an opinion about a character. In filling these gaps, readers draw on their prior experiences (including reading experiences), their purpose for reading, and their expectation of the text (Rosenblatt 1978; Benton and Fox 2006). Picture book reading is often a collaborative experience, involving a more experienced reader and many opportunities for talking and thinking about the unfolding story. Hearne in her discussion of the connection between the oral tradition (in particular the transmission of folktales) and children's books, states that both represent "active, adaptable, practical, negotiable literature" (18). She describes children's literature as "both iterative and interactive, with reading aloud in the early years introducing an extra dimension of narration, a storytelling voice that often serves as commentator on the authorial text" (18).

Subsequent readings provide new opportunities for reader interaction. Iser reminds us that "a second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first ... familiar occurrences now tend to appear in a new light and seem to be at times corrected, at times enriched" (280).¹⁶

Tucker (1981) explores the concept of reader interaction in relation to the illustrations in picture books. Illustrations have the potential to both reduce and increase opportunities for creative participation within a work. They may reduce by fixing details that would otherwise have to be imagined, such as the setting, or

¹⁶ Mahy also has much of interest to say along these lines. I explore her observations in relation to her writing for the 1980s Ready to Read series in Chapter Nine.

the appearance of characters, or increase by manipulating perspective, revealing subplots, or adding competing ideas. Tucker writes: "Pictures that do everything for a reader, by bringing out and emphasising all the most obvious points in a style that can immediately be understood, can of course be very useful and indeed sometimes loved by children, but they do not really cater for the imaginative cooperation of a child" (49). Tucker goes on to cite Ardizzone: "'One should not tell the reader too much. The best view of a hero, I always feel, is a back view'" (49). This returns us again to Frank Smith's view of reading as a process of readers asking themselves questions and finding answers. Alan Garner (2015) expresses this idea through metaphor: "Story does not instruct. It shows an open palm, not a pointing finger".¹⁷

In addition to "filling gaps", the creative participation of the reader is required in relation to the introduction of ideas (in text or illustrations) that are unfamiliar. Iser ("Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response" 1971) suggests that a literary text is "a familiar world reproduced in an unfamiliar way" (8), inviting the reader to consider matters from a new perspective. Bettelheim and Zelan (1982) write that there is "truth in the idea that we like to read about people and settings similar to those we know, but only if what we read leads us to new, unexpected perspectives, and provides us with new thoughts and a new awareness of motives of our actions and those of others (260). Lukens expresses a similar view in her description of literature, which "at its best gives both pleasure and understanding. It explores the nature of human beings, the condition of humankind ... in children's terms: What are people like? Why are they like that? What do they need? What makes them do what they do?" (8). Meek (*How texts teach* 1988) describes how the artist or storyteller stimulates children's imaginations "by presenting them with the familiar in a new guise or by making a 'logical' extension of the real ... they create patterns and vary them. The reader enjoys both the security of the familiar and the shock of novelty" (14).

¹⁷ For an edited version of Garner's lecture see "Alan Garner: Revelations from a life of storytelling" <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/03/bronze-age-axe-space-telescope-and-art-story-alan-garner-being-made-myths>

The following section explores the particular characteristics of five classic picture books and the opportunities within them for the “creative participation” (or “imaginative cooperation”) of the reader. In Chapter Four, I use this analysis as a basis for comparison with the 1963 Ready to Read materials.

***Harry the Dirty Dog* (1956)**



Figure 2.1. *Harry the Dirty Dog*.

When Harry is confronted with the prospect of a bath, he runs away from home and has a series of adventures. He becomes very dirty and, unbeknown to himself, changes from a white dog with black spots into a black dog with white spots. When he returns home, he is horrified to discover that his family do not recognise him. Harry performs all his best tricks to try and show them who he is but nothing works. In desperation, he digs up the scrubbing brush that he had buried in the garden and races up to the bathroom begging for the bath he rejected at the beginning of the story.

This book clearly demonstrates Crago’s “opposites” (“black and white”, “dirty and clean”, “acceptance and rejection”) and evokes profound emotional engagement. It also stimulates considerable intellectual engagement through its use of irony, positioning the reader as knowing more than Harry does and able to delightedly anticipate his eventual dilemma. The text and illustrations stimulate tremendous sympathy for Harry but along with this is a great deal of humorous ambiguity, creating many spaces for interpretation. The reader is drawn in right from the front cover. While the title names one dog, the cover illustration shows *two* dogs, one white with black spots and one black with white spots. Following on from the cover are two illustrated title pages, the first showing a white dog with black spots. There is a scrubbing brush on the side of a steaming bath but it is not clear what the connection is to the dog (whether the bath is meant for him; whether he is retrieving or replacing the brush). He may be smiling, possibly at

the prospect of a bath but the smile could also just be the result of having to open his mouth wide for the brush. As yet, there is no sense of conflict, other than the oddity of the two dogs shown on the cover. Already, with only the title and two illustrations revealed, several potential story pathways are offered. The following illustration shows the dog racing away with the scrubbing brush in his mouth, perhaps running away, perhaps (though less likely) running to find someone to give him a bath. There remains the puzzle of whether this story is about one dog or two. If Harry is the dirty dog, as stated in the title, who is the clean dog shown in these illustrations? While raising these questions, the illustrations are also evoking a sense of the dog (or dogs) as an adventurer, a rebel. It is also creating an expectation that the story will be lighthearted and humorous.

The written story begins on page five, confirming that this dog is indeed Harry, though he is clearly not (or, at least, not yet) the dirty dog of the title. The vigorous digging and flying soil in the page six illustration is the first intimation of the connection between the two, and this is confirmed as he proceeds through his series of adventures.

The text and illustrations provide an omniscient viewpoint, revealing to the reader (but not to Harry) that he is becoming the “Dirty Dog” of the title. The engaging illustrations build emotional involvement with Harry’s plight, especially when he is rejected by his family. The emotional climax of the story comes when Harry appears to have given up and is walking away: “Harry gave up and walked slowly towards the gate” (24) and is just as dramatically contrasted by the change in tone of the second half of the sentence (“but suddenly he stopped”). Some readers will immediately realise why Harry has stopped; others may need the illustration on the facing page to remind them of the hole that Harry had dug earlier. There is a wry narratorial comment when Harry, after having dug up the scrubbing brush, begs for a bath, describing this as “a trick he had certainly never done before” (28). This also serves both as a reminder to the reader that it was his aversion to having a bath that made Harry decide to run away in the first place and possibly, to cause the reader to think back to the ambiguity of the two dogs shown on the cover. That they are indeed

the same dog is confirmed by the children's "discovery" as they wash him. The final illustration shows Harry asleep and dreaming. The text refers to "the scrubbing brush he'd hidden under his pillow," ending on a further note of ambiguity: Does Harry have the brush because it made him clean and solved his problem or because he is going to make sure that he can avoid having another bath? The question as to whether the family (or some of the family) really did not recognise him or whether they were teasing him is also left unanswered.

***Little Bear* (1957)**

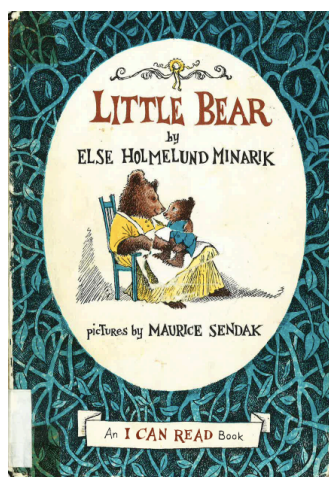


Figure 2.2. *Little Bear*.

Little Bear is a collection of humorous stories, very simply told, about Little Bear's exploits and predicaments. The humour, to a large extent, lies in the positioning of the reader as knowing more than Little Bear. The anthropomorphic characterisation of Little Bear and his mother (they walk upright, live in a house, wear clothes, and read books), together with the gentle style of the illustrations, and the depiction of

Little Bear's friends (a cat, a hen, and a duck) guide the reader to think of these bears as friendly and charming, not as wild animals. The stories focus on the warm relationship between Mother Bear and her child. Mother Bear is a constant, reassuring presence, demonstrating patience in the face of Little Bear's frequent questions, and often referring to him as "my little bear."

Little Bear's name, the illustrations that emphasise his small size in relation to his mother, his simple dialogue ("‘Oh,’ said Little Bear, ‘it is a hat. Hurray! Now I will not be cold’" (13)) and endearing behaviour (for example, thinking that Mother Bear has forgotten to make him a birthday cake) position the reader as being older and wiser. The reader is able to predict events or the solution to problems long before Little Bear does. In the story "What Will Little Bear Wear?" Little Bear's repeated requests for items of clothing give readers time to realise and relish the irony of a bear thinking he needs to wear clothes to keep warm. At the end of the story when Little Bear has taken off the hat, coat, and snow pants

given to him by his mother, the narrator draws attention to this with the final comments addressed to the reader: “And he was not cold. What do you think of that?” (21).

There are clues, however, that suggest Little Bear may not be as naïve as he seems. The wishes he shares with his mother in “Little Bear’s Wish” (to sit on a cloud, to sail on a Viking boat, to tunnel to China, to drive a big red car, and to eat cake with a princess) show that he is well acquainted with stories. After his mother has pointed out that he cannot have those wishes, Little Bear’s next wish is that “a Mother Bear would come to me and say, ‘Would you like to hear a story?’” When Mother Bear agrees that this is a wish he can have, Little Bear says, “That was what I really wanted all the time” (57). Whether this is true or not is left up to the reader. What it does seem to suggest, however, is that Little Bear knows the difference between what is real and what is make believe. There is a similar humorous ambiguity in “Little Bear Goes to the Moon” in regard to Little Bear’s imaginary play. After he jumps from a tree and “lands” on the moon, the story goes:

Then he sat up and looked around.

“My, my,” he said.

“Here I am on the moon.

The moon looks just like the earth.

Well, well,” said Little Bear.

“The trees here look just like our trees

The birds look just like our birds”. (42-43)

The illustrations show that, of course, Little Bear is right in his recognition of the similarities between the “moon” and the earth (and the trees and the birds), though what is not clear is whether he is still pretending. When Little Bear comes to “a house that looks just like my house” (44), Mother Bear asks “But who is this? Are you a bear from Earth?” (46). Again, it is Little Bear who controls the game. He tells his mother to stop teasing and says, “You are my Mother bear and I am your Little bear, and we are on Earth, and you know it” (48).

Although the stories seem very simple in regard to their language and storylines, like *Harry the Dirty Dog*, they leave the reader with questions to ponder: Why did Little Bear think he needed to wear warm clothes in the snow? What convinced Little Bear that his own fur coat was warm enough? Did Little Bear really think he could fly to the moon? Was it his intention all along to ask his mother for a story?

***Are You My Mother?* (1960)**

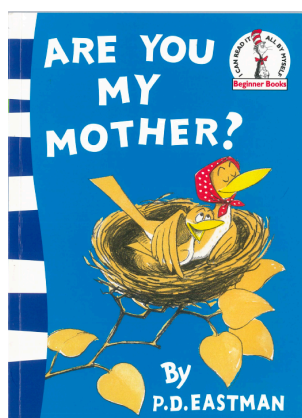


Figure 2.3. *Are You My Mother?*

Are You My Mother? also centres on the loving relationship between mother and child, but lacks the pervasive, gentle reassurance of the Little Bear stories. Baby Bird falls out of the nest soon after hatching while his mother is away looking for food. He undertakes a quest to find his mother but having never seen her and therefore not knowing what she looks

like, his task seems hopeless (at least to the reader). Baby Bird himself is almost irrepressibly optimistic, or perhaps unaware of the enormity of his task. He asks every creature he meets “Are you my mother?” After several unsuccessful attempts, Baby Bird is scooped up into the air by a “Snort” (which turns out to be a digger). Just when matters seem at their bleakest, the digger deposits the baby back in his nest where his mother is waiting for him.

This story features a series of dramatic contrasts (big and little, loss and recovery, danger and safety). Yet the cheerful cartoon-style illustrations, the characterisation of Baby Bird, the humour in his thinking that such unlikely creatures (and machines) as a cat, a cow, or a boat could be his mother, along with the ability of the characters to talk, and the rhythmic, repetitive language place the story into the realm of make-believe, distancing the reader from the daunting reality of Baby Bird’s situation.

This book, like *Little Bear* takes full advantage of the crossover between the “readability” of the language and the aesthetic and emotional effect of repetition.

Simple statements such as “The kitten was not his mother. The hen was not his mother. So the baby bird went on” (26) are not only compelling for new readers to read aloud but also convey the enormity of Baby Bird’s task and determination, and build an expectation of an eventual climax.

The illustrations play several roles in this story. As already mentioned, they are humorous and reassuring, portraying Baby Bird as indomitable. On the other hand, the elimination of any background detail unrelated to Baby Bird’s quest emphasises his isolation. The illustrations also offer “new perspectives,” prompting the reader to consider the world from a novel point of view: How does Baby Bird, who doesn’t know what his mother looks like know what to look for? This is emphasised when Mother Bird appears in an illustration but is not noticed by Baby Bird: “He did not know what his mother looked like. He went right by her. He did not see her” (20). The illustrations encourage the reader to identify with Baby Bird as the hero of the story while at the same time positioning the reader as knowing more than he does. Not only does the reader know what Baby Bird’s mother looks like, they know what she does *not* look like and so can anticipate Baby Bird’s questions and the answers he receives.

Despite the seriousness of Baby Bird’s dilemma, the tone of the story (which is largely established through the illustrations and Baby Bird’s “upbeat” dialogue) remains optimistic and positive, with the reader never in any real doubt that Baby Bird will find his mother.¹⁸ The repetition of the simple, direct questions and answers, for example, with Baby Bird’s declaration, “‘I did have a mother,’ said the baby bird. ‘I know I did. I have to find her. I will. I WILL!’” (37) builds up a rhythm and momentum, a sense of pace and determination.

¹⁸ This assumption does in fact depend on children’s previous experiences of stories. This expectation of a happy ending may be less certain for children with little experience of storybook reading.

The Cat in the Hat (1957)

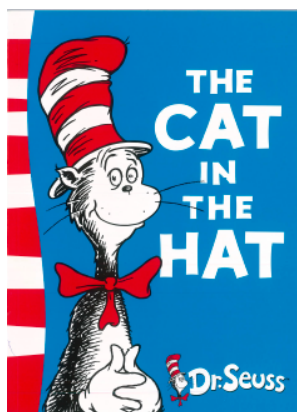


Figure 2.4. *The Cat in the Hat*.

The Cat in the Hat, like *Harry the Dirty Dog* and *Are You My Mother?* balances psychological angst with humour, both in text and illustration. Like *Little Bear*, *The Cat in the Hat* has a domestic setting, but one that is turned on its head. The Cat's unexpected arrival subverts the idea of home as a safe place, and of parents as a comforting, reassuring presence.

This book is memorable for the way in which it surprises and challenges the reader, juxtaposing the very familiar with the bizarre. The title with its short words and obvious rhyme might, without the accompanying cover illustration (of a creature that is hardly recognisable as a cat), suggest a simple story but the subsequent pages quickly dispel this expectation.¹⁹ The page one illustration shows two children sitting at the window of a house, looking glumly outside at a rainy miserable day. Although the children are positioned at the centre of the illustration, they are tiny, reflecting their relatively insignificant role in the story. There is a tree with a mop of wild blue foliage on the right of the house, and a bird poking its head out of the tree and grimacing as large drops of rain bounce off its head. A further surprise for the reader comes with the discovery that this is a rhyming text:

The sun did not shine.
It was too wet to play.
So we sat in the house
All that cold, cold, wet day. (1)

There are some obvious questions for the reader at this point, such as what the connection might be between the title and the two children. A further question

¹⁹ Fitzsimmons (2016 43) in describing the genesis of this story, notes that Seuss, after being given an “approved” vocabulary list, decided to base the title (and the story) on the first two words on the list that rhymed.

(as to who is narrating the story) is answered, implicitly, on page two (“I sat there with Sally”). The (soon-to-be-realised) ironic significance of the narrator’s words, “How I wish we had something to do!” (2) is built up by the inclusion of an almost-two-page description of how bored the children are. The turn of the page reveals the word “BUMP!” dominating the page five illustration. The children and their pet fish, sitting on a shelf just under the “BUMP!” are all looking to the right with shocked expressions. The accompanying text reads: “And then / something went BUMP! / How that bump made us jump!” Here we have, almost literally, a jumping off point from the (relatively) familiar into the unknown, inviting the reader to imagine not only what has caused the bump, but where this strange story might be heading.

It is not until page eight, when the children are talking with The Cat, that it becomes clear that the children are home alone (“Our mother was out of the house/ For the day”). The Cat tries to persuade the children that they should let him demonstrate his tricks by saying “Your mother/Will not mind at all if I do” (8). The children’s uncertainty is contrasted with the fish’s determined opposition: “He should not be here./ He should not be about. /He should not be here/ When your mother is out!” (11). This absence of a parent figure is in strong contrast to the other books discussed here.

This story is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty, which the young reader may or may not try to resolve. The doubt and nervousness of the child narrator and the commentary from the fish in the bowl maintain an underlying tension. There is a degree of resolution at the end of the story, with The Cat leaving and the house being restored to order, but this, too, is undercut by the narrator’s worry about whether to tell his mother what has happened. There is also no guarantee that The Cat will not return (as indeed he does in the 1958 sequel, *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*) seeing as he came “out of nowhere” on this occasion. These unresolved elements mean that the reader, to an extent, shares the confused perspective of the narrator. In fact, Seuss emphasises the issue by having the boy address the reader directly, finishing the story with a question as to whether the boy should tell his mother: “Should we tell her about

it? / Now what SHOULD we do? / Well ... ? What would YOU do / If your mother asked you?" (61).

Despite this ambiguity and uncertainty, the language, the zany, cartoon-style illustrations, and the unlikely nature of The Cat's tricks keep the tone, for the most part, humorous. The mesmerising effect of the rapid patter and humour of the rhyme distract the reader from too deep or literal consideration of the actual events in the story (including the absence of the children's mother). Frye's (1976) description of the lulling and entrancing effect of such language, "the overwhelming of sense by sound" (124), is particularly relevant to this story, with the rhyming text sweeping the reader along.

***Lucy and Tom's Day* (1960)**

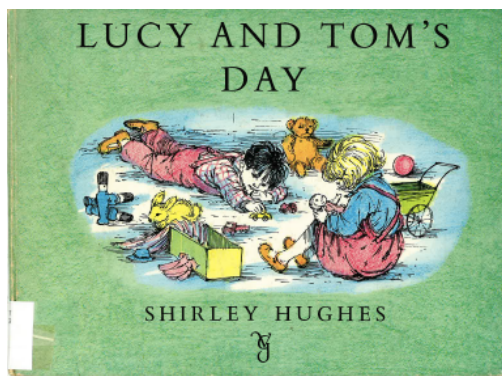


Figure 2.5. *Lucy and Tom's Day*.

Lucy and Tom's Day is a middle narrative, following two children through a day, but with no particular storyline, no problem to be solved or surprise to be discovered. Yet the interplay between the text and the illustrations adds ironic humour. The point of this story is not so much what

is different or unusual about the children's daily life but what is the same, its comforting reassurance and predictability.

The design of *Lucy and Tom's Day* is notable for its acknowledgement of young readers (particularly readers with younger siblings) giving them access to the ideas in the book even if they are not yet able to read the words. There are five illustrations before the written story begins, giving the reader many opportunities to build ideas about Lucy and Tom before they hear (or read) the text. The cover shows two children, presumably the Lucy and Tom of the title, playing with toys. The precedence of Lucy's name in the title combined with her depiction in the illustration suggests that she is the older of the two. Full-colour, whole-page illustrations on the front endpapers show Lucy and Tom asleep in bed, and a black-and-white line drawing facing the title page shows the children

getting dressed, indicating this is the beginning of the children's day. The line drawing shows Lucy getting herself dressed and Mum helping Tom, reinforcing the idea that Lucy is older (and more capable) than Tom. The first double-page spread of the story proper (2-3) is dominated by a full colour illustration, with the text placed at the far right of the right-hand page. The familiar opening words, "Once upon a time," connect with children's experiences of story and create a sense of anticipation. This first section of text clarifies some of the inferences that readers are likely to have already made about Lucy and Tom. Although Lucy and Tom are both referred to as "little children," the text confirms some significant differences between them. "Lucy is big enough to get out of bed and put on her slippers and her red dressing-gown. Tom sleeps in a cot. He throws all his toys out, one by one – bump – on to the floor" (3). Throughout the book, there is a contrast between the helpful and responsible behaviour of Lucy, and the endearing but less responsible behaviour of Tom.²⁰ The story ends with the children back in their bedroom. Tom is already "cuddled down" in his cot while Father is reading to a sleepy Lucy (25). The end papers have the same illustrations as at the beginning of the book, suggesting the satisfactory closing of a circle and the reassurance of the same things happening over and over.

The conversational style of the narration invites the reader, to share the narrator's amused viewpoint. A key example occurs on pages six and seven where the text reads, "After breakfast, Lucy is very busy helping her mother about the house. Tom especially enjoys making the beds" (6). The illustration for page six shows Lucy at the sink with her back to the reader, while on the facing page there is no text but instead a series of five smaller illustrations showing Tom *not* "making the beds." He makes an effort to begin with, then jumps on the bed, and, finally, makes a bed "tent" and snuggles into it. Other examples of the contrasts between the behaviour of the two children include Tom waving his spoon about while Lucy eats her porridge (5), having an afternoon nap while Lucy stays awake (16), and throwing his toys out of the bath (24). A further instance of the narrator's collusion with the reader (adopting the perspective of

²⁰ There is gender stereotyping here, too, not unusual in picture books of this era. I discuss this aspect in more detail in Chapter Five.

a child rather than an adult) occurs within a description of the children going to the park where “the mothers like to sit together on the benches and talk a lot” (19).

In addition to the opportunities for children to speculate about Lucy and Tom and to enjoy the narrator’s ironic viewpoint, Hughes encourages the “creative participation” of the reader by having the narrator “invite conversation”. On several pages, the narrator refers directly to what is in the illustration: “This is a picture of them in the early morning” (3) or “This is the street where Lucy and Tom go with their mother to do the shopping” (10). Such statements seem intended to invite readers to talk about their own similar experiences.

Exemplifying the characteristics of picture books

The classic picture books discussed here undoubtedly provide opportunities for “creative participation” and evoke aesthetic and emotional responses. They offer “new, unexpected perspectives,” showing the familiar in an unfamiliar way, devising “what if” scenarios that create uncertainty and ambiguity to negotiate, gaps for the reader to fill.

They exemplify the characteristics of picture books, being simply told, clearly structured, having a strong emotional focus, and language and illustrations that convey meaning and add aesthetic impact. All are notable for the way in which their language accentuates the structure of the narrative, through such devices as repetition, and the use of the language of contrast and comparison. This extract from *Harry the Dirty Dog*, as well as conveying an engaging picture of Harry’s antics, “guides” the reader into noticing the escalation of Harry’s situation: “He played where they were mending the street and got very dirty. He played by the railway and got even dirtier. He played tag with other dogs and became dirtier still” (8-13). The short sentences in “What Will Little Bear Wear?” seem straightforward, yet their very repetition gradually reveals a humorous twist, inviting the reader to notice that what Little Bear says is not always right. When Mother Bear gives him a hat to wear in the snow, Little Bear says, “Hurray! Now I will not be cold” (13). This dialogue is repeated when Mother Bear gives him a coat, snow pants, and, finally, his own “fur coat.” In *Are You My Mother?* Eastman maximises the potential of Baby Bird not knowing what his mother

looks like by having him consider and reject creature after creature, creating humour and delight in the repeated questions and statements. The very short, almost staccato sentences in *The Cat in the Hat*, along with their end rhymes, emphasise the pace and escalating chaos of The Cat's behaviour. In *Lucy and Tom's Day* there is patterning of the caption-style statements, describing first what Lucy is doing and then Tom, emphasising, in a gently ironic way, the idea of Lucy being older and more capable.

All five books revolve around ideas of opposites (clean and dirty, home and away, knowledge and lack of knowledge, Mother and "not" Mother, calm and chaos, old and young, big and little). All five show clear progress towards an outcome (Harry and Baby Bird in trying to regain their place in their family; Little Bear in solving his problems and exploring his ideas; the children in trying to cope with The Cat in the Hat; and tracking the progress of a day in the lives of Lucy and Tom).

These books build on the familiar themes of home and family, of relationships with loved ones, creating, in Crago's words, a "central situation" closely linked to "a central emotional issue for the child" (103). The emotional angst in *Harry the Dirty Dog* and *Are You My Mother?* is relieved by the inclusion of animal protagonists, creating a safe distance from the emotional reality of the situations of separation and loss, allowing for a more humorous or ironic view. Harry, Little Bear, and Baby Bird play major roles in drawing the reader into the story, evoking an emotional response and encouraging identification. The reader cares what happens to them and vicariously experiences their heroic feats, their resourcefulness, sense of adventure, and perseverance in the face of difficulties. The reader can appreciate the humour in the characters' predicaments, knowing they are not real.

The Cat in the Hat, however, is an interesting departure from the cosy reassurance typical of many books for young children. This departure is a foretaste of the memorable developments in picture book publishing that were to occur before the 1980s revision of the Ready to Read series (which I discuss in Chapters Six to Ten).

The broader context for young New Zealand readers

Both *Suggestions for Teaching Reading in Infant Classes*, the Ready to Read handbook written by Myrtle Simpson (1962), and *Suggestions for Teaching English in the Primary School* (1961) emphasise the importance of children reading widely. They include lists of recommended reading (all of which include the classic picture books discussed above). These lists give an insight into the sort of books that were available in New Zealand classrooms, and to a certain extent, into ideas about readers that may have influenced the initial development of the Ready to Read materials.

In addition to the classic books discussed here (and others by authors such as Charlotte Zolotow, Marjorie Flack, Ruth Krauss, Lois Lenski, and Roger Duvoisin), Simpson recommends that teachers make available “easy picture and story books” to “increase the children’s confidence and independence” in reading (40). She describes such books as having “good illustrations and easy repetitive texts” and being “easy enough for children to handle and read to themselves ... after they have looked at and discussed the pictures, and sometimes joined in as the teacher has read the text with them” (29). While these characteristics are typical of the classic picture books I have discussed, they do not in themselves ensure books of longstanding appeal to children. This is possibly best demonstrated by exploring what some of these books imply about children as readers.

Several of the titles of the lesser-known books address the reader directly (*Do You See What I See?*, *Where Have You Been?*, *How Old Are You?*, *Let’s Be Friends*, *Play With Me*, *Come to the Zoo*, *Whose Little Bird Am I?*), implying a conversation with the author, perhaps in the role of a parent, grandparent, or teacher. Some use childlike terminology (*Big Talk*; *A Bunny, a Bird, and a Funny Cat*; *The Day Daddy Stayed Home*.) The simplified language, and in some cases, the direct address of the reader, have the effect of emphasising the gap between author and reader.

Come to the Zoo (1948) by Ruth M Tensen is dedicated to “every little boy and girl who is learning to read.” This book is a collection of photographs of zoo animals accompanied by captions such as “Come in and see my house” and “Up, up, up I go” (2-3) using, as stated in the front matter, vocabulary from commonly

used basic word lists. There is no linking narrative and, while the photographs are engaging and provide plenty to talk about, the captions detract from the reading experience, making this book seem more like a word-reading exercise.

Two of the books on the recommended reading list are by Miriam Schlein, an author whose books Simpson mentions as being some of her favourites to use with children. *The Sun Looks Down* (1954), illustrated by Abner Graboff, describes a series of scenarios (the sun watching over the world, the shepherd watching over his sheep and so on) and ends with an illustration of a family and the statement, all in upper-case: "LOOK WHO TAKES CARE OF YOU!" (n.p.). The design of this book is bright and engaging, featuring a variety of typefaces and with collage effects in some illustrations. *Big Talk* (1955), also by Schlein, illustrated by Harvey Weiss, is a loving conversation between a mother kangaroo and her child, formatted so that each part of the conversation is split over two pages, inviting the reader to think about what the initial comment might mean before turning the page to find out. While these books are attractive and invite reader interaction (to guess what or who is going to be revealed on the next page), they are didactic in intent, emphasising the idea of children's dependence on adults.

Play With Me (1955) by Marie Hall Ets is a charming but ultimately didactic story about a young girl who sits by a pond but finds that none of the creatures she sees will come close to her. Eventually, she discovers that if she sits still, the animals will come. The blurb for this book gives a clear indication of the moral purpose and tone of the story:

One by one, grasshopper, frog, turtle, chipmunk, blue jay, rabbit, and snake all ran away from the excited little girl. But when she realized that animals don't like to be caught any more than children do, and that catching isn't really the same as playing anyhow, she sat down by the pond very still and very patient. Then there came a happy, happy ending to the lovely, sunny morning.

The lists include two books by Lilly Mosheim, illustrated by Audrey Walker, that, like *Come to the Zoo*, are designed especially for beginning readers. The

front blurb for *Elizabeth and her Doll, Susan* (1959) states that the story “tells of a day in the life of a small girl. Elizabeth might be *any* small girl and the adventures she has are so familiar and described in such easy phrases that they will help any child learning to read.” The back blurb of both this book and *Peter and his Tricycle, Flash* (1959) refer to the author’s notion of a need “for more easy-to-read picture books for the very young which are “about themselves.” (Ironically for New Zealand readers, these are stories of British children.) Elizabeth, as the title suggests, has a doll named Susan. Elizabeth gets up, gets dressed, gets Susan up and dressed; they have breakfast together, then go outside to play, and so on. Nothing exciting happens and the story ends with Elizabeth and Susan tucked up in their respective beds. Like *Lucy and Tom’s Day*, this story is a “middle narrative” but without the humour and irony that make the Hughes book memorable.

Peter and his Tricycle, Flash also centres on everyday life but is far more dynamic and plot-driven, reflecting gender-role stereotyping typical of the 1960s. Peter gets a red tricycle for his fourth birthday and pretends to be, first, a telegraph boy, then a greengrocer doing deliveries, and then a coach-driver. The climax of the story occurs when he crashes the bike into a fence while pretending to be a fireman. His father is unable to fix the tricycle, so they take it to a garage instead. The story ends with Peter deciding that when he is grown up “he will have a real garage and he will mend all the broken tricycles of all the children for miles around” (n.p.).

As in the Schlein and Ets books discussed previously, these books present a view of children as needing to be looked after, instructed, or controlled by adults. Their subject matter is restricted, for the most part to the familiar and everyday worlds of children, the one exception here being the ability of the animals to speak in *Big Talk*. They imply a child reader who is considerably less knowledgeable than the author, and who needs the reassurance of familiar content and predictable storylines. In contrast, the “classic” books discussed earlier in this chapter imply a reader with a lively interest in books and stories, with a sense of humour, who enjoys language and new ideas. How the Ready to

Read materials attempt to bring together these contradictory aspects is the focus of Chapter Four.

New Zealand picture books

A further aspect to note as part of the broader literary context for the 1963 Ready to Read series is the scarcity of New Zealand picture books in the early 1960s. None are included on Simpson's lists of recommended reading. As Gilderdale notes in her entry for *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (1991), no New Zealand picture books had been published before the 1940s and only five published by 1950 (464-65).²¹ Of these, all but one featured animals or fairies rather than real children. The following section describes some of the few New Zealand picture books available in these years (see Figure 2.6).²²



Figure 2.6. Some New Zealand picture books of the 1950s.

²¹ See Chapter Six for a discussion of the post-1963 growth of New Zealand picture book publishing.

²² I make a distinction here between picture books (books where the story depends on the pictures) and illustrated books for older readers (where the pictures add interest but are not essential). Two books that fit the latter category are *The Story of Wiremu* (1944) and *Turi, the Story of a Maori Boy* (1963), both of which I discuss in Chapter Eleven.

The Adventures of Nimble, Rumble, and Tumble (1950), written and illustrated by Joan Smith, and winner of the Esther Glen Award in 1951, is a lively account of three young animals (a deer, a lion, and a bear) who are chased by Growly the panther. The only thing that marks this as a New Zealand book, however, is the nationality of the author. Smith's book is, in fact, not typical of New Zealand publishing for children in this period. Gilderdale (*A Sea Change* 1982) describes the previous one hundred and fifty years of New Zealand writing for children as being characterised by an earnest desire "to tell children about the Maoris, the settlers, the bush, the native birds, and the hazards of rising tides and fast-swelling rivers" (2).²³ Margaret Mahy ("Multiple Voice" 2003) writes that when she tried to get her stories published in the 1960s, New Zealand commercial publishers "made it plain that their only commercial option was to publish books with a New Zealand voice" (154).²⁴ This imperative is clearly reflected in all but one of the following examples.

The Little Moa (1954) by Kathleen Ross, illustrated by Cherry Earle, is another animal story, this time in an early New Zealand setting. In this "ugly duckling" story, the little moa is ridiculed for his very short legs, but ends up as a hero after saving the other moa from hunters. His small size enables him to hide himself underwater and bite the chief hunter, making the hunters run away from the "devil" in the swamp. The blurb for this book states:

Few stories exist for New Zealand children about animals native to their own country. As a result, most of us have been brought up on stories of lions, tigers, elephants and bears with never a sight of Moa or Kiwi except in the dry pages of school text books. Now, at last, our own peculiar treasure The Moa, has found its way into a story that will captivate any child anywhere.

²³ Gilderdale is referring here to all writing for children, not just picture books.

²⁴ Fortunately, the New Zealand *School Journal*, perhaps because of the greater editorial freedom afforded through its miscellany format was happy to accept Mahy's fantasy writing in these years.

Three books, written and illustrated by Avis Acres, about the adventures of the pohutukawa fairies, Hutu and Kawa, enjoyed a brief but intense period of popularity. *The Adventures of Hutu and Kawa* (1955), *Hutu and Kawa meet Tuatara* (1956), and *Hutu and Kawa Find an Island* (1957), apparently inspired by the stories of the Gumnut babies by Australian writer May Gibbs, combine fantasy fairy adventures with scientifically accurate depictions of New Zealand bush and coastal settings. While the stories have well-constructed plots, and the illustrations (some of them full-page and in colour) are visually appealing, the books are relatively text-heavy and the coloured illustrations are sometimes placed several pages away from the relevant section of text.

Avis Acres also wrote and illustrated one picture book with human characters. *Opo, the Gay Dolphin* (1956) is a fictionalised and brightly-illustrated account of the true story of a friendly dolphin who mesmerised and delighted people in the seaside town of Oponini for ten months in 1955-56.²⁵ The story is centred around the experiences of two children, and both the story and the illustrations evoke impressions of 1950s New Zealand.

It is clear that while New Zealand children in the early 1960s had access to many picture books, albeit of varying quality, they did not have easy access to New Zealand books. The absence of New Zealand picture books from the recommended reading lists accentuates the significance of the Ready to Read materials in developing stories about the lives of New Zealand children.

²⁵ Opo's life came to a sudden and mysterious end, an aspect, not surprisingly, glossed over in the book. (Acres has Opo "speak" to one of the children in a dream, reassuring him that all is well.) There is a summary of the story of Opo at <https://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/4700/the-story-of-opo>

Chapter Three

Creating the Ready to Read series

Every child must be brought to feel that reading is an interesting and exciting thing to do and that his classmates and the adults that he meets find delight in it.

Suggestions for Teaching English in the Primary School.

This chapter describes how the Ready to Read series came to be developed, what the materials were like, and what we know about their effectiveness as an instructional reading series (I reserve discussion of the literary aspects of the 1963 materials for Chapter Four). Two key sources of information are *Suggestions for Teaching Reading in Infant Classes* (1962), the Ready to Read series handbook written by Myrtle Simpson, and a 1984 UNESCO report, *The Ready to Read Project – The New Zealand Experience* written by Neil Leckie.²⁶

The educational context

Under the leadership of Clarence Beeby, Director of Education 1940-60, the mid-twentieth century was a dynamic time in New Zealand education, with the Department of Education supporting, and sometimes leading, innovations in teaching. Ewing (1970) describes these years as being characterised by Beeby's desire for "the closest possible consultation between the Department of Education and the teachers" in relation to curriculum development (208). New syllabuses were being introduced into many subject areas including English, art and craft, social studies, and arithmetic.²⁷ Teachers were encouraged to incorporate opportunities for activity-based (developmental) learning. *Suggestions for Teaching English in the Primary School* (1961) includes a substantial section on "The Developmental Programme" (15-34), which recommends that teachers provide classroom activities that allow for "joy in

²⁶ This was a report of a UNESCO regional seminar held in New Zealand to learn about the New Zealand education system, and in particular, its approach to reading instruction and the provision of instructional materials. Leckie was a former Director of the Early Childhood Division of the Department of Education

²⁷ Helen May also provides an informative and lively account of this period of New Zealand education in Chapter Five of *I am Five and I Go to School* (2011).

movement, delight in experiment with natural materials, pleasure in make-believe and in playing a part, the satisfaction of making things, [and] a developing interest in books and writing” (17-18). As described in Chapter One, the importance placed on reading is demonstrated by the inclusion in *Suggestions for Teaching English* of a section headed “Learning to want to read” and the statement:

the ability to read is more than being able to recognise words. It is also the capacity to respond with imagination and with appropriate feeling to the experiences books can give. The essence of teaching reading, therefore, is to create the need and the desire to read, and attention must be paid to this at all levels of education. (12)

Such ideas were informing the development of content for the *School Journals* of the time, but not yet the reading materials for younger students. Instead, infant classes were being provided with the *Janet and John* series, imported from England by the Department of Education.²⁸

The *Janet and John* books were designed to be used with a “look and say” teaching approach. This involved children being pre-taught the words they would meet in the text. The texts themselves, rather than being stories, were a series of short, often imperative statements that maximised the repetition of the words that students had learned. An example is shown in Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1. *Janet and John* Books 1 and 2 and pages 12-13 from Book 1.

²⁸ The *Janet and John* books were published by James Nisbet and Co.

Such materials were unlikely to create the “desire to read”. Certainly, they did not reflect how New Zealand children (or indeed, any children) actually spoke or behaved. Leckie describes growing dissatisfaction with the *Janet and John* books in the 1950s, with teachers finding that “the heavy emphasis on vocabulary acquisition, including the teaching of words prior to their introduction in a story with a view to preventing failure, tended to produce dependent readers with inadequate strategies for overcoming difficulties met in the course of reading other material” (38). He reports that teachers also expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the stories, particularly at the early levels, and “with the nature of the child characters portrayed and family qualities depicted” (38).

Developing the Ready to Read series

By the late 1950s, concerns about the *Janet and John* materials and the impending costs of paying for a reprint prompted the Government to ask the Department of Education if they might consider publishing homegrown instructional materials for students in the early years of school. The Department agreed, and asked Myrtle Simpson, a former senior inspector of schools, to be the editor of the new series. A planning committee was established which included teachers, Simpson, Pat Hattaway (the chief editor of School Publications), and another former school inspector, Bryan Pinder (Price 2004 3-4).²⁹ Simpson, following Beeby’s lead, instituted extensive consultation with teachers, advisers, school inspectors, staff from universities and teachers’ colleges, and groups from the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI, the primary teachers’ union), both before and during the publication process (Simpson 44).³⁰

²⁹ Pinder later became Director of Primary Education.

³⁰ The level of cooperation with the teachers’ union is a notable feature of the 1963 series. NZEI had its own publishing branch and, in 1970, in addition to producing several booklets about early reading, published *Reading Units for the Junior School*, a collection of suggestions gathered from teachers for effective ways of using the Ready to Read materials. I have used examples from this handbook to provide insights into the reception and use of the 1963 materials.

As a result of the pre-consultation process, it was agreed that the Ready to Read series should be made up of proper stories (meaning stories with plots and realistic characters) that students would enjoy reading and find meaningful (Leckie 38). As indicated in Chapter One, this approach had not been tried before in developing material for children at the beginning stages of reading instruction.

Associated with this was the decision to use “natural language” within the materials rather than the contrived, highly constrained language of the *Janet and John* books. Leckie describes natural language as being “language New Zealand children would naturally experience in conversation and in the course of having stories read to them” (39). *Suggestions for Teaching English* states that the idea behind the books had not been “to devise a vocabulary and then to construct a story, but to choose themes that interest small children and to write about them very simply [...] the concentration on story value first has been deliberate, so that the interest and humour of the text provide the main incentive for the children to read on – just to find out what happens next” (14). There was still, however, a degree of control over vocabulary, with checks made to ensure, for example, that basic “sight words” (such as “and,” “here,” “I,” “is,” “look,” “said,” “the,” “to,” “we,” “went”) were introduced gradually and repeated often, and that new words were “introduced in a significant context” (14) to support children in identifying them.

Perhaps most important of all, the materials were to be New Zealand books for New Zealand students, reflecting the vision articulated by Beeby in 1957 “that we should begin the child's education from his own world immediately surrounding him” (Wells 6). Simpson states that whether the books “help children to acquire the most important ‘skill’ of all, *reading for meaning* ... depends to a large extent on the interest the stories hold for them and on how familiar they are with the concepts and situations in the text” (48). With this in mind, the focus in the series was on realistic fiction with content “closely related to the environment of New Zealand children” (48). Arnold Campbell, Director of Education, writes in the foreword to *Suggestions for Teaching Reading in Infant Classes* that “... several teachers recounted school experiences that were shaped into other ‘true’ stories about New Zealand children” (5).

The three 40-page *Janet and John* books, generally read by students in the first year of school were to be replaced by twelve “little books,” each one a complete story.³¹ Simpson observes that teachers who had used other reading series that were in little-book formats (caption books and books for older readers) “were enthusiastic about the sense of achievement children experienced from being able to read fairly quickly through a small book” (47). This little book format was also similar to the sorts of materials children were creating for themselves at school. Simpson reports that “many teachers spoke of helping children to make their own first reading books: simple accounts of their activities at home and at school that the children dictated to the teachers and illustrated themselves” (44). For students in the second or third years of school, there were to be six miscellanies, four of which included adaptations of traditional tales as well as original New Zealand stories.³²

There are no author acknowledgements for the little books but it appears that they were co-authored by Myrtle Simpson and Eve Kitchener, a teacher (Randell 2000 13; Price 2004 8). Kitchener also wrote several stories for the miscellanies, as did Rae Huson and Helen A. Cutten. Illustrations were either done by in-house art editors or commissioned. They include work by several artists, such as Roy Cowan, Peter Campbell, and Graham Percy, who were later to establish significant reputations.³³

To ensure that the new materials reflected children’s lives and enabled “reading for meaning,” draft versions were trialed (though without illustrations) in over thirty schools, including some within the Māori Schools Service (Leckie

³¹ These twelve books were commonly referred to as the “little books”. Simpson’s handbook, for example, includes a chapter entitled “Using the Little Books” (60). I have continued this practice in this thesis.

³² Although I have referred to year levels here, there was in fact a high degree of flexibility in regard to expectations about students’ progress. Simpson includes a section in her book headed “Reading Must be Easy Enough” (38-40). She warns that trying to teach children to read from books that are too difficult for them is to invite failure.

³³ See *A Nest of Singing Birds* by Greg O’Brien for further information about these artists and their work for the New Zealand *School Journal*.

39; Simpson 5).³⁴ It is timely to note that while the series developers aimed to include content “closely related to the environment of New Zealand children,” there were in fact significant differences between the experiences of Pākehā children and many Māori children. For Māori, years of European settlement had resulted in economic disadvantage, weakening of traditional communities, and marginalisation of Māori language. Often, Māori children struggled at school, where the language, routines, and expectations were very different from those at home. Despite the inclusion of Māori schools in trialling, the representation of Māori children in the 1963 materials proved to be problematic, an aspect I explore in subsequent chapters.

In her account of the trialling process, Simpson states that most teachers “seem to have given a short introduction to the story by discussing the names and ages of the characters and helping the children to read the title and discuss its possibilities. One teacher pointed out that many of the words they were to meet later in the story cropped up quite naturally in this discussion” (78). The students would then attempt to read the text aloud with the teacher listening in, and providing support as required. Simpson reports that after the reading, “most teachers seem to have found that children gained a great deal from making up their own books about the stories” (79). Teachers also commented that “reading the stories often led naturally to expression work: painting, acting, or modelling” and that a notable aspect of the feedback from teachers was about “the extent to which the books were read again and again,” with one teacher commenting that “the children sat in the library corner and read the books with complete absorption” (79).

Describing the 1963 materials

The published materials were very much what the series developers had set out to achieve: meaningful stories using natural language that reflected the lives of New Zealand children (though as indicated earlier, not all children). In this section, I describe the books and, in particular, how the series developers

³⁴ Māori schools had been established in the late nineteenth century for Māori children in rural communities, primarily to facilitate the learning of English.

addressed the challenge, particularly in the little books, of creating meaningful stories in very few words.

The twelve “little books” were indeed small, 96 mm by 150 mm, with coloured covers that indicated reading levels, progressing through red, yellow, blue, and green (see Figure 3.2).³⁵ Each book had eighteen pages, including the inside front and back covers, and was a complete, stand-alone story about one of five families (all Pākehā) in a range of settings that included home, school, a department store, an airport, and a campsite by a river.³⁶ All twelve books had the same format, typeface, and layout, with the print always on the left-hand page and the illustration on the facing page, plus one double-page illustration to prompt discussion during the reading.³⁷ The little books did not include page numbers. The amount of text per page gradually increased from an average of one or two lines (three to ten words) in the first book to six or seven lines (twenty-five to thirty words) in the twelfth book.



Figure 3.2. The twelve little books.

³⁵ See <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-readytoread.html> for digitised versions of the twelve little books and the first two miscellanies.

³⁶ Price states that it had been intended to have one family for each colour level but a payment dispute with one of the illustrators meant that a new family had to be hastily created and a different artist commissioned to illustrate *The Fire Engine* (Price 9).

³⁷ The illustrators of the little books were named on the back covers. They were: for the first two red books, Conrad Frieboe; for the third red book, Bill Jenks; for the yellow books, Dora Riddell; for the blue books, Mary Roberts; for the green books, Paul Olds.

The miscellanies included contents pages and author acknowledgments with the title of each miscellany being chosen from one of the stories within the book (see Figure 3.3).³⁸ They ranged from 44 to 92 pages and the number of words per page increased markedly, from about 60 words in the first up to more than 170 in the sixth. As the number of words increased, the number of illustrations decreased. Jill MacDonald, a School Publications art editor who was later to play a significant role in the design of Picture Puffins, was largely responsible for the colourful design of the miscellanies, with their attractive covers and end pages.



Figure 3.3. The six miscellanies.

A natural language series

The use of natural language was intended not only to make the stories more engaging, but also to enable children to draw on their own knowledge of spoken language to help them in word-solving and reading for meaning. As graded reading materials, however, there still needed to be a degree of control over such factors as the number of words per book, the words themselves, and the rate of introduction of new words. The series developers approached this challenge in several ways.

The books continued to feature the repeated use of a core set of commonly used words. But a significant innovation compared to other instructional reading series of the time was the inclusion of a wide range of “interest words,” challenging the commonly held view that these words would be too difficult for students (Hancock 2016 21). When describing the planning for the series, Simpson writes, “[a]t almost every meeting where this question was discussed teachers were in favour of enlarging the vocabulary by the inclusion of ‘interest

³⁸ I have used italics for the titles of the miscellanies and quotation marks for the titles of individual stories or poems.

words,” with the general opinion being “that children easily recognise words that have some relation to their own experience” (44). This innovation proved popular when the books were trialled. Simpson reports:

One teacher wrote: ‘I felt that, despite the fact that few of the children had ever seen an escalator, they loved the idea of it and the taste of the word.’ She admitted that there were some rather odd pronunciations at times: ‘tricolator’ and ‘picalator’ (there was an ‘alligator’ at another school), but she thought this was unimportant compared with the enjoyment children got from the word. ‘Once they managed to get their tongues round it they remembered it correctly, and in any case whatever the pronunciation it was still a moving staircase.’ (45)

Teachers of slightly older students reported that children were incorporating words such as “astonished” and “commotion” into their conversations and classroom writing (46).

While some of the monosyllabic, imperative verbs of the early *Janet and John* books (“come,” “look,” “see,” “play,” “jump,” “go”) were retained, they were enlivened by the addition of a much more varied and dynamic selection (for example, “barked,” “cleaned,” “drive,” “fishing,” “help,” “hop,” “hosed,” “laughed,” “painting,” “play,” “shaving,” “shouted,” “swimming”). Similarly, rather than the somewhat prosaic nouns (such as “horse,” “dog,” “kitten,” “aeroplane,” “boat,” and “slide”) within the *Janet and John* books, the Ready to Read stories featured such nouns as “escalator,” “Viscount” and “Friendship” (types of planes), “fire engine,” “smoke,” “ladders,” “hose,” “jungle gym,” “football,” “trucks,” and “bulldozers”.

It is possible that the “relaxation” of vocabulary may have been influenced in part by the writing of Sylvia Ashton-Warner in *National Education* (1955 and 1956) about “organic” teaching and vocabulary.³⁹ Ashton-Warner’s theory, developed through her many years of teaching in Māori schools, involved helping children to use their own “key vocabulary,” words of particular personal

³⁹ *National Education* was the newsletter of the NZEI. Ashton-Warner published these articles under the name of “Sylvia.”

significance, to write their own stories about their own lives. She asserts that children should be encouraged to share very personal experiences and use words associated with deep emotions (love, fear, death), and that teachers should not censor children's writing. Simpson, who, in her handbook, is generous in her recognition of influences on her ideas, does not, however, mention Ashton-Warner. Perhaps what Ashton-Warner put into writing was what many teachers were already doing with their students, that is, encouraging them to talk, draw, and write about their own lives, and then using their stories as personalised reading materials.

There were also changes to aspects of language beyond mere vocabulary. The stilted imperative sentences of the *Janet and John* series (as shown in Figure 3.1) were replaced with informal language, including attributed dialogue, and punctuation features such as speech marks, question marks, and exclamation marks to support meaning and add interest. Figure 3.4 shows an example of the contrast in the language style (as does Figure 3.1).

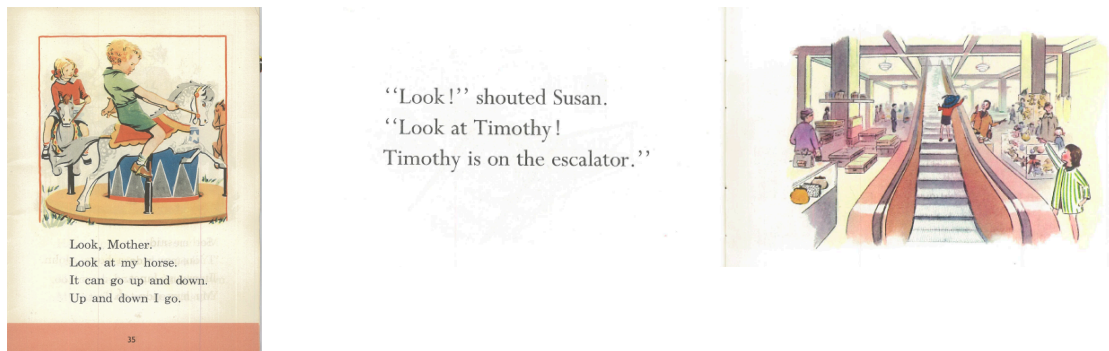


Figure 3.4. Extracts from *Janet and John Book 2* and the Ready to Read book *Where is Timothy?*

Finally, in order to provide more opportunities for children to become familiar with the vocabulary at each level (in other words, to make the gradient of difficulty more manageable), the Department of Education provided a chart of the core vocabulary to other publishers so that they could produce supplementary books for sale to schools. While several publishers did so, the Department of Education, after seeking feedback from teachers, endorsed the Price Milburn (PM) readers as the most appropriate supplementary series for schools to purchase (Price 10). The PM books (commonly referred to as PMs or PM Supplementaries) featured different characters from those in Ready to Read,

but used similar ideas. For example, to support *Early in the Morning*, there was a set of PM stories about being asleep and waking up. Where Ready to Read had stories about looking for Timothy, and about Timothy playing football with the big boys, PM had stories about characters looking for people or things and about being big and little. For the next twenty years, the Ready to Read series and PM Supplementaries remained closely aligned.

The stories

Within constraints such as controlled vocabulary, simple sentence structures, and overall text length, the twelve little books managed to incorporate drama and humour. The storylines often revolve around some form of “rule-breaking” or unexpected behaviour by a child or pet. In the first book, *Early in the Morning*, which describes a family waking up and getting ready for the day, the (modestly) dramatic element involves the boys hiding from Mother under the table. In the second book, the youngest child, Sally, gets up (when she is supposed to be in bed) to play with the new doll that Grandma has brought her. In *The Fire Engine*, Father, Frank, and Harry are distracted by the sight of a fire engine fighting a house fire and forget that they are supposed to be getting bread from the shop. In *Where is Timothy?*, Timothy goes missing in the department store while Susan and Mother are preoccupied with looking at hats. In a later book, Timothy decides that he prefers to play football with the “big boys” at school rather than with the other five year olds. *Saturday Morning* ends with Richard, the youngest child, spraying the rest of the family with the hose, and in *Painting the Shed*, Mark, who has not been allowed to help because he is “too little,” seizes an opportunity and does it anyway. *A Country School* culminates in some humorous role-playing, when at playtime, Penny decides to drive the “school bus” the children have made, and Mr Pitama, the teacher, pretends to be one of the children. In *The Pet Show*, William the goat creates havoc; in *At the Camp*, the family dog runs off with Dad’s shoe, and son Michael manages to “catch” it the next day when he is fishing.

The plots become gradually more complex as the range of vocabulary and number of words in the books increases. As with the little books, the original stories in the miscellanies often include humorous elements. The storylines include dogs turning up at school, characters being forgetful, and caged mice

escaping at a country fair. There are also stories with a more serious focus. For example, a cat is stuck at the top of a telegraph pole, a penguin is trapped in an uninhabited beach house, a child is scalded and has to go to hospital, and a group of children need to be rescued when they are stranded by the incoming tide. Several of the stories in the miscellanies have distinct New Zealand settings, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

The Hungry Lambs, the first of the miscellanies, was intended to ease students into reading the longer stories, providing children with “the opportunity to gain confidence and to enjoy reading and discussing stories about some of the characters they met in the little books” (Simpson 80). The second miscellany, *Boat Day*, written by Rae Huson and illustrated by Peter Campbell, differs from the others in that all of the stories are about the same characters, children at a country school and their teacher. The children race their toy boats in the school swimming pool, admire a real boat that a neighbour brings to school, and put on a circus to entertain their parents. Towards the end of the third story, events begin to centre on Wiri, a lively, irrepressible Māori boy, who seems to delight in disobeying the teacher, playing tricks, and causing havoc. (A closer analysis in Chapters Four and Eleven of these stories about Wiri reveals problematic ideological emphases within the series.)

The four miscellanies at the higher levels, *The Donkey’s Egg*, *The Sweet Porridge*, *The Stars in the Sky*, and *Sliding and Flying*, include traditional tales as well as original New Zealand stories. Simpson describes two of the traditional tales, “The Stars in the Sky” and “My Own Self” (both in *The Stars in the Sky*) as “pure fantasy” (83), and notes that they were the “most criticised” of all the stories that were trialled.⁴⁰ Some teachers felt strongly that it was inappropriate to include fantasy in an instructional reading series but others were so enthusiastic about these stories that the decision was made to retain them (83).

A third fantasy story, “‘Excuse Me,’ said the Rubber” by Doris L. White was included in *Sliding and Flying*. This story, set in a classroom after school, is about Rubber and Pencil, who together draw their way out of the classroom and into a

⁴⁰ Both stories were adaptations by Joseph Jacobs (1880) of English traditional tales.

new life in the countryside.⁴¹ Again, this generated extremes of opinion. Teachers at one school commented the children were “very impressed and intrigued with the idea of a pencil ever objecting to his work” while a teacher from a different school considered it “ridiculous,” claiming that “the children were not amused” and that she would leave this story out of the series (85). It is interesting to note that by the time of the national evaluation of the Ready to Read series in 1975, attitudes to fantasy stories had changed significantly, with many teachers asking for more fantasy stories to be included. (I explore this aspect further in subsequent chapters.)

A further interesting aspect of *Sliding and Flying* is the inclusion of two short poems, “The Whale” and “The Elephant” by James K. Baxter, who was at this time an editor within the School Publications Branch. There is very little information, however about how these poems were received. Simpson, in the reading handbook, makes no mention of them. The 1970 NZEI handbook includes some teaching suggestions for “The Whale” but does not mention “The Elephant.” Since poems have always appeared frequently in the *School Journal* and were a major feature of the revision of the Ready to Read series in the 1980s, it is difficult to understand their relative invisibility in the 1963 materials.

Telling stories in few words

The stories in the little books are written in the third person, mostly from an objective, omniscient viewpoint, and have a “teacherly,” moderately authoritative style. The authorial statements are closely aligned to the illustrations, and are, in fact, very similar to the types of captions that students would be writing (or having the teacher write for them) at school.

The stories employ a curious mixture of present-tense and past-tense statements, often in relation to the attribution of dialogue: “Bill is asleep. ‘Wake up, Bill,’ said Peter”; “Frank and Harry and Father are going to the fire. ‘Look at the smoke,’ said Harry.” Some stories in *The Hungry Lambs* and *Boat Day* begin

⁴¹ This is similar to the idea behind *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson (1955).

with present-tense statements that set the scene (for example, “Miss Pennyfeather teaches the children in the primers” (*Boat Day* 4)), but beyond this, the stories in the miscellanies are narrated in the past tense, and with one exception, in the third person.⁴² Although the decision to incorporate the use of the present tense was presumably governed by instructional considerations, it also has the effect of creating a sense of action and immediacy.

The determination of the series developers to provide meaningful stories for beginning readers required careful manipulation of storylines, language, and book design. Storylines were based on ideas likely to be familiar to students so they could be conveyed in as few words as possible. The titles (which the teacher would read to the children) and cover illustrations in the little books play a key role in clarifying the context without the need for scene-setting or context-setting words that would be beyond the ability of beginning readers. Two examples are shown in Figure 3.5.



Figure 3.5. Ready to Read book covers.

In *Early in the Morning* (the first book in the series), the title and the picture of one boy waking another sets the scene for children to talk about what they do early in the morning, about their siblings, about waking up and having breakfast, and so on. The illustration is also an opportunity for the teacher to tell children the names of the boys, so that when they attempt to read the first page (“Bill is asleep”), they are likely to feel confident and have a good chance of reading the page correctly. This also sets the language pattern for the next few pages (“Bill is asleep. / ‘Wake up, Bill,’ said Peter. / Sally is asleep. / ‘Wake up Sally,’ said

⁴² “A Donkey at School” (*The Donkey’s Egg*) is told in the first person, with the narrator adopting the persona of a young girl, allowing for a more child-centred view of events.

Mother”). Similarly, the title and cover illustration for *Christmas Shopping* introduce ideas about Christmas and presents and children’s experiences of going on shopping trips with parents. They help to shape their expectations of the story (to support them in reading for meaning) without giving too much away.

In the little books, where the vocabulary is most limited, the illustrations are pivotal to the story. They set the context, reveal character, and clarify the narrative (often conveying shifts in time and place), as well as providing opportunities for the teacher to guide students’ reading responses. In the two spreads from *Early in the Morning* (shown in Figure 3.6), the illustrations directly support the text, allowing for few interpretations other than “Bill is asleep” and “Father is shaving.”

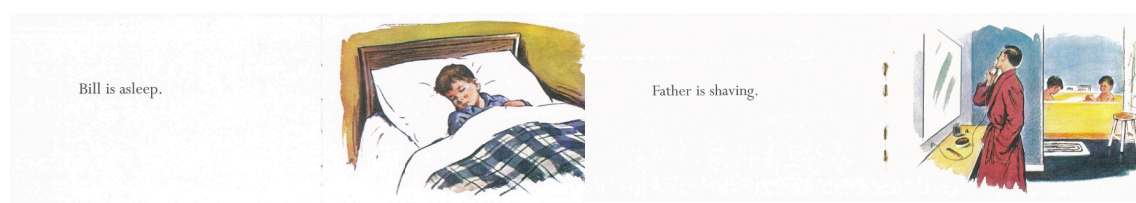


Figure 3.6. “Bill is asleep,” “Father is shaving,” *Early in the Morning*.

As this story proceeds, however, the illustrations convey information that is not in the text at all. Alongside a seemingly dull conversation (“Come to breakfast, Bill. / Come to breakfast, Peter,” / said Mother. / “Here I am,” said Bill. / “Here I am,” said Peter), the illustrations reveal that there is actually a lot more going on, and that the boys are hiding under the table, as shown in Figure 3.7.



Figure 3.7. A surprise ending, *Early in the Morning*.

Similarly, the opening illustration of *The Fire Engine* (the boys leaving their house carrying a shopping basket and looking purposeful) provides several clues that support the information in the written text that they are “going to the shop for Mother.” The basket in the illustration provides a focus for the students to

speculate on what they might be going to buy, in preparation for the new word – “bread” – on the following page. As well as adding a touch of drama to the story, beginning readers are learning about the integration of text and illustration.

All the little books rely heavily on dialogue to convey information and move the story along. *Painting the Shed*, for example, has dialogue in twenty-nine of its thirty-two sentences. Conversations between the characters, in combination with the illustrations, almost replace the narrator, conveying information without the need for extended explanation. One senses that the writers were at pains not to intrude into the narratives, providing just enough textual information to support the students in making sense of the story. In contrast to the self-effacing narrator of the little books, the narrators in the miscellanies seem more prominent, providing more descriptive detail, and sometimes commenting on events and addressing the reader directly.⁴³

The challenge of narrating stories in few words can have the serendipitous effect of creating opportunities for the “imaginative cooperation” of readers, gaps for them to fill. In the example from *Early in the Morning* cited above, there is no comment as to why Bill and Peter decide to hide under the table, and, in fact, no textual reference at all to their hiding. Neither is any attention drawn to the questions of whether there was anything wrong with Timothy playing football with the big boys and if he might try it again (*Playtime*); why Richard decided to hose the family (*Saturday Morning*); and if Mark was being helpful or naughty in *Painting the Shed*. The stories rely on readers making connections to their own experiences, lending extra justification to Simpson’s insistence on including content likely to be familiar to readers. This is also likely to have the effect of increasing reader engagement (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

The wider classroom programme

Suggestions for Teaching Reading in Infant Classes describes approaches to reading instruction, and how teachers might use the new Ready to Read books. Simpson’s handbook is closely aligned with *Suggestions for Teaching English* in

⁴³ Examples include *The Hungry Lambs* (30 31 32 34), *The Donkey’s Egg* (46), *The Sweet Porridge* (76), *The Stars in the Sky* (44), and *Sliding and Flying* (58).

its emphasis on the central role of language in learning. In her handbook, Simpson states that children “will come to reading very happily in a classroom where everything has been planned to stimulate their natural desire to learn to read and write” (16). Simpson is very clear that, as well as being enjoyed in their own right, the new Ready to Read materials were intended to be used alongside a wide range of other reading materials, including materials from other reading series, books created by the students themselves, and picture books. She states, “no matter how limited classroom space may be, it is essential to make a corner where children may sit and look at books [...] If a teacher regards the book corner and the books there as something quite separate from the reading lesson, the children will adopt the same attitude, but if during reading time she frequently gathers a group in the book corner and reads with them from an easy picture book, there will be no idea of separation in the children’s minds” (28-29).

The reception of the 1963 Ready to Read series

There is strong, though (inevitably) anecdotal evidence that the 1963 series was successful in helping children learn to read and want to read. Simpson’s handbook is the most comprehensive source of information in regard to the initial reception of the series, although, clearly, Simpson’s role as series editor means that her comments may be somewhat selective. Leckie’s 1984 report, commissioned by UNESCO provides a more objective and longer-term view, and includes information from the 1975 national evaluation of the series. Leckie states that “[a]s teachers gained experience with the new reading materials and with the recommended classroom organisation and methods, the materials were found to be effective in developing children’s reading abilities” (39). Ballantyne (2009), in describing the educational context of the 1960s, acknowledges the impact of the Ready to Read series, stating that it “both reflected and contributed to shifts in classroom teaching of reading in New Zealand” (19). She goes on to point out that Marie Clay’s research into early reading behaviours had coincided with the introduction of the Ready to Read materials in schools so that “she was well placed to observe how the teachers managed the materials and how the

students responded” (20).⁴⁴ May (2011) considers Myrtle Simpson and Marie Clay as responsible for making New Zealand’s approach to reading instruction “internationally renowned” in these years, Simpson for her development of the Ready to Read series and Clay for her research into the process of learning to read and her subsequent publications (175).⁴⁵ To this day, the New Zealand Ministry of Education reading handbooks closely reflect the findings of Clay’s research into early reading, as do the Ready to Read books for students.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the success of the series took it beyond New Zealand. In 1965, Methuen bought the international rights to the Ready to Read series, and Myrtle Simpson and Pat Hattaway travelled to the UK to establish the series there.⁴⁶ The New South Wales Government also bought the series for use in schools.⁴⁷

Within New Zealand, the 1963 series provided a common core of instructional reading materials for students for almost twenty years, and contributed to a shared understanding of effective reading instruction. The fact that the Ready to Read series is still being published, and with many of the same textual characteristics, suggests that the original 1963 materials have had a significant and lasting influence on ideas about instructional reading materials. Just as significant, within the literary context of the 1960s, the series for the first time provided young New Zealand children with stories in which they could see themselves. It seems fair to say that the 1963 Ready to Read series indeed helped

⁴⁴ Clay used her research into early reading behaviour as the basis for her development of “Reading Recovery”, an intensive individualised teaching intervention for students making slowest progress in learning to read.

⁴⁵ In 1972 Clay published *The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties* and *Reading: The Patterning of Complex Behaviour*. May describes these two books as launching Clay’s “national and international reputation” (175).

⁴⁶ I discuss the UK adaptation of the series in Chapter Five.

⁴⁷ The Director-General of Education, A. N. V. Dobbs, refers to this in an address (“The Mythical Golden Age”) he gave at the opening of a language course in Christchurch. See *Education* vol. 23, no. 8, 1974.

bring children “to feel that reading is an interesting and exciting thing to do”
(*Suggestions for Teaching English in the Primary School* 11).

Chapter Four

The 1963 Ready to Read series as children's literature

The essence of teaching reading ... is to create the need and the desire to read, and attention must be paid to this at all levels of education.

Suggestions for Teaching English in the Primary School.

Simpson considered there should be no significant difference between children's perception of instructional reading and reading for pleasure (1962 28-29). Certainly, the 1963 "little books" were a great improvement on the *Janet and John* books, and teacher feedback (from the trialling of the 1963 materials and in the 1975 national review) confirms that children enjoyed the stories. Yet, it is debatable as to how the materials may have measured up to classic picture books in regard to providing opportunities for "creative participation". The three Early Readers discussed in Chapter Two (*Little Bear, The Cat in the Hat, Are You My Mother?*) demonstrate how it is possible to create highly engaging stories that are accessible to relatively inexperienced readers. Yet none of these Early Readers are about real children living real lives, a principle that was central to the 1963 Ready to Read series. Also, while the Early Readers use a restricted range of vocabulary, it is still a much broader range than in the earliest levels of the Ready to Read series. This chapter considers the literary qualities of the 1963 materials and the extent to which, within the constraints of controlled vocabulary and realistic content, they may have bridged the gap between instructional reading and reading for pleasure. (The following chapter considers their role as New Zealand literature for children.) My focus in both chapters is on the original stories created for the series and not the adaptations of traditional tales, which come from an already well-established literary tradition.

The influence of the instructional context also needs to be kept in mind. The Ready to Read books were designed to be read, in the first instance, with a teacher and a small group of children, with the talk within the reading group shaping and supporting the individual child's reception of the text. Two publications that provide an insight into the sorts of reader-text interactions that might have been expected or encouraged during group reading are Simpson's

1962 handbook, and *Reading Units for the Junior School* (1970). The latter book was developed by teachers and published by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI). It was reprinted ten times between 1970 and 1978, suggesting that it was well used by teachers.

Storylines

Crago (1985) suggests the importance within stories for children of “an underlying narrative structure that is easily grasped in terms of paired opposites (harm done/harm righted; victim stolen/victim returned etc)” (103). Despite their determinedly realistic contexts, contrast between “paired opposites” is indeed a feature of many of the original Ready to Read stories. Timothy is lost and then found; Mark is bored and then not bored; Dad’s shoe is taken and then retrieved; a duckling is abandoned and then looked after; children are stranded by the tide and then rescued.

The stories reveal a further set of “paired opposites”: that of “adult and child” (or “older and younger”). Although children are at the centre of the action, the dramatic impact of many of the stories depends on their interaction with adults, most often parents. Several stories feature children or animals who misbehave, or are prevented from doing something they want to do (or sometimes both), often because they are “too young.” A recurring theme is that of not being allowed to come to school. The humour or drama within the stories relies to a large extent on the readers’ complicity in the importance of knowing and following rules and expectations, and the assumption that adults (or older siblings) know best. In some stories, older sisters serve as “models” of correct behaviour for younger brothers (as Lucy does in *Lucy and Tom’s Day*) but without the gentle irony that invites Hughes’ readers to share in the humour. Twice, when Timothy goes missing, his older sister Susan goes looking for him (and finds him); in *Christmas Shopping*, older sister Helen remains focused on the task of buying Christmas presents while the illustrations show younger brother Mark writhing with boredom; and in *Painting the Shed*, Helen is allowed to paint the sandpit but Mark is not.

Most of the stories have a central conflict or problem (Timothy gets lost twice; Mark is desperately bored by Christmas shopping, and, in a later story, is not

allowed to help his father paint the shed; William the goat refuses to cooperate for the pet show). Some stories have a quest format, a journey towards a goal, although with a domestic focus, for example, going to the shop for the bread, looking for Timothy, or, as in “Jenny Comes to School,” heading for a forbidden destination. Other stories are closer to Nikolajeva’s (2012) description of “middle narratives” (as in *Lucy and Tom’s Day*), more a sequence of everyday events rather than a focus on a central problem or goal, though most stories finish with a touch of excitement. *Early in the Morning* describes a family getting ready for the day, but ends on a humorous note with the boys hiding under the table; *Going to School* describes Timothy’s first day at school, and ends with Timothy joyfully showing Father the plane he has made; in *Saturday Morning*, most of the story is about Mark and Helen helping Father clean the car, but at the end, little brother Richard becomes the focus when he decides to spray his family with the hose, and so on.

Several stories include chaotic, almost slapstick episodes not unlike those in *The Cat in the Hat*. In *The Pet Show*, William the goat runs away with the red ribbon; in “Wiri the Clown,” Wiri brings a pig to school and it runs amok; in “A Dog Plays Football” (*The Sweet Porridge*), Hugo the dog creates uproar when he runs into the classroom with a football.

Surprise endings

It is perhaps more the rule than the exception that these instructional reading materials include surprise endings. Rather than including emotive content as in the classic picture books discussed in Chapter Two, the Ready to Read stories tend to use humour and surprise, conveyed through both text and illustration, to provide contrast and evoke reader responses. Both the expression on Dad’s face when he and the children realise they have forgotten the bread in *The Fire Engine*, and the final pages of *Painting the Shed* (shown in Figure 4.1) with their combination of dramatic dialogue and illustrations, are climactic and engaging, inviting reader response.



Figure 4.1. The final pages of *The Fire Engine* and *Painting the Shed*.

While surprise endings have the effect of “rewarding” the reader for the effort put into their reading, they also have the practical benefit of not requiring further explanatory closure. The surprise ending instead becomes an opportunity for “creative participation,” with children sharing their responses and ideas about what will happen next or considering deeper questions, like, for example, whether Timothy should have been allowed to play with the big boys (in *Playtime*). It is interesting to note, however, that there are not many of these deeper sorts of questions in the NZEI handbook.

Surprise endings also help build readers’ awareness of how stories are constructed. As previously mentioned, Bellorin and Silva-Díaz (2012) note the importance of expectation and surprise in helping inexperienced readers learn about literature. They state that children “learn to fill in the gaps of concealment to make predictions, and in the process of rereading, to confirm and correct these predictions in order to achieve closure [...] they become aware of the fact that elements in the text and pictures are not there casually,” but are providing “hints and clues” for them to recognise and put together (117-18). We see this at work even in *Early in the Morning*, the very first book in the series (also discussed in Chapter Three). The initial pages of the story introduce the family members and show them getting ready for the day but, towards the end of the story, it becomes apparent that Bill and Peter are missing. This is not stated explicitly; instead there are clues for the reader (the text states who *is* at the table; Bill and Peter are not shown in the illustration; Mother calls them to breakfast). To an experienced reader, these aspects may seem obvious but for new readers they are building an awareness of “hints and clues”. In the illustration on the following page, readers find out that Bill and Peter have been hiding under the table.



Figure 4.2. *Early in the Morning.*

In *The Fire Engine*, Mother's request for the boys to go to the shop for the bread is the clue to the surprise ending (although, on the first reading, most readers, like Frank and Harry in the story, will forget about the bread in the excitement of the appearance of the fire engine). In *Christmas Shopping* the illustrations of Mark give clues to the idea that the end of the story is going to focus on him. These illustrations, some of which are shown in Figure 4.3, add a delightful irony in that they are telling a story, not mentioned in the written text, about Mark's increasing boredom and frustration.



Figure 4.3. *Christmas Shopping.*

Painting the Shed and *The Pet Show* provide a more obvious pathway to their surprise endings through repeated incidents that encourage the reader to predict an eventual climax. In *Painting the Shed*, Mark tries in vain to be allowed to help, which means that his decision to seize the opportunity to paint the shed for his father, while dramatic, is not completely unexpected. In *The Pet Show*, the repeated misbehaviour of the goat, the patterning of the language, and the question in the text ("Where is William the goat?") invite the reader to predict that the goat will do something outrageous:

"Get up, William,"
said Michael.
"Get up, William,"
said the boys and girls.
William will not get up.

"Who is ready? said Mr Pitama.

"My pig is ready," said Penny.

"My calf is ready too," said Mary.

"William the goat is not ready,"

said Michael.

The judge is ready.

The teacher is ready.

The boys and girls are ready.

The pets are ready.

Where is William the goat?

Characters

The brevity of the 1963 stories does not, in general, allow for much in the way of character development with few of the characters leaving a lasting impression. Instead they tend to be broad-brush representations of "types" such as the caring, efficient mother, the competent, jocular father, the kind teacher, the sensible big sister, and the naughty youngest child or family pet. Most of the characters are unremarkable and could, in fact, be swapped from one story to another without any noticeable impact. Some characters, however, such as Timothy, Jenny, and Wiri *do* stand out for their sense of adventure and disdain for rules, offering their own "new perspectives" on the situations in which they find themselves (not unlike Harry the Dirty Dog and Baby Bird).

Timothy

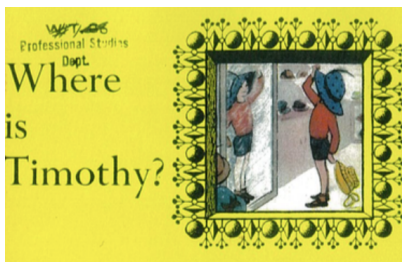


Figure 4.4. *Where is Timothy?*

Timothy first appears in *Where is Timothy?*, a story of only 104 words, illustrated by Dora Ridall. Analysis of this story also demonstrates the clever crafting of text and illustrations that provides many opportunities for reader engagement and interaction.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Kate De Goldi (2002) mentions *Where is Timothy?* as a book that stands out in her early "reading life," though she misremembers it as belonging to the PM series (7).

While the title clearly indicates that this will be a story about Timothy, the question adds intrigue. It could be asking the readers where Timothy is now (as shown in the cover illustration) or could be an indication that he is going to become lost. Mother's dialogue on the opening page ("This is the shop," said Mother./ "Where are the hats?") and the accompanying illustration appear to confirm that Timothy is in a shop, though there are gaps for the reader to fill. One, for example, is the need to infer that this entry into the shop is happening at an earlier time than the events shown on the cover. The following spread introduces an exciting element when Susan and Timothy notice the department store escalator, an object that would have been new and intriguing for many readers.⁴⁹ There is a touch of ironic humour here in that the page opens with Susan saying "I am going up on the escalator," whereas the illustration shows Timothy already on the escalator ahead of her. The scene switches again on the next spread (another gap in the textual narrative for the reader to fill), when Mother tells Susan to look after Timothy. The following spread shows Mother and Susan (but not Timothy) engrossed in looking at hats. Timothy reappears by himself in the next illustration, trying on hats, but is absent from the next two double-page spreads. Instead, the focus is on Mother and Susan, and their realisation that Timothy has disappeared. Mother's dialogue ("Susan, where is Timothy? Are you looking after Timothy? Where is Timothy?") does not explicitly state that Timothy is lost, but encourages reader inference. The cheerful, almost cartoon style of the illustrations and their portrayal of Timothy's "perkiness" allay the potential worry of his disappearance, as does the fact that the story focuses on the viewpoints of Mother and Susan as seekers rather than on Timothy's viewpoint as a lost child. Indeed, when he is found, riding on the escalator and wearing a stylish blue hat, there is no sense that Timothy thinks of himself as being lost. The final spread, a double-page illustration with no accompanying text, shows Timothy returning the hat to a smiling sales assistant with Susan and Mother in attendance.

⁴⁹ Exciting and intriguing, both in concept and language. Simpson (as quoted in Chapter Three) writes: "One teacher wrote: 'I felt that, despite the fact that few of the children had ever seen an escalator, they loved the idea of it and the taste of the word' (45).

This story offers much for the reader to notice and consider, and establishes Timothy as a character to watch out for. There are three more stories about Timothy in the 1963 series, *Going to School*, *Playtime* (which revisits the theme of Susan looking for Timothy who, this time, has decided to play football with the big boys), and “Timothy Gets Ready” (in *The Hungry Lambs*) which I discuss later in this chapter.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, and as demonstrated here, dialogue is commonly used in the Ready to Read stories to convey information. In addition to the practical outcome of moving stories along without the need for children to read extra explanatory detail, this has the effect of intensifying the focus on the interactions between the characters, creating a more satisfying reading experience. This device is used to great effect in “Jenny Comes to School”.

“Jenny Comes to School”

As we shall see, “Jenny Comes to School” (*The Hungry Lambs*) engages through its memorable protagonist, its narrative structure, the interplay between text and illustrations, and the opportunities it provides for readers to “creatively participate” in the reading.

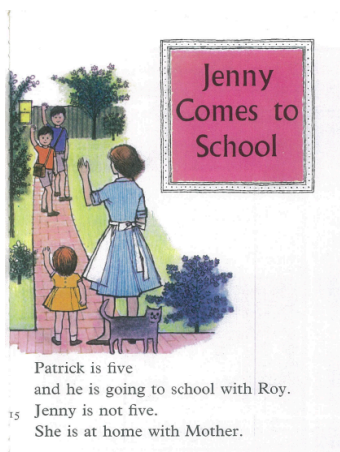


Figure 4.5. “Jenny Comes to School” (15).

A situation of conflict is made apparent within the first two sentences, where the information that Patrick is five and going to school with Roy is contrasted with the information that “Jenny is *not* five” (*italics added*). The illustration shows the back views of Jenny and Mother in the foreground, waving to Jenny’s brothers as they leave.

This positioning of Jenny means that both she and the reader are looking “outward” from Jenny’s angle, emphasised by the strong vertical line of the brick pathway, which the boys are following into the outside world (Jenny’s “yellow brick road”). For five- or six-year-old children reading this text, the idea of starting school as a “rite of passage” was likely to have had strong emotional resonance, and possibly evoke a feeling of smugness that they are no longer in

Jenny's situation of being the child who has to stay home. Yet, right from this first page, the text and illustrations are carefully designed to turn the sympathy of the reader towards Jenny and her plight, rather than the boys. The placement of Jenny in the foreground (and in a bright yellow dress) means that she is actually "bigger" and more obvious on the page than her brothers. Although she and her mother have their backs to the reader, the cat next to them is looking at the reader, drawing attention to this part of the illustration. The final line on the page: "She is at home with Mother," coupled with the boys waving and about to "disappear" out of the top of the picture (and the story), move the focus to Jenny and what is going to happen while she is "at home."

The following two pages clarify Jenny's feelings, with their dialogue providing insights into her thinking and motivation: "I have no children to play with. The children are at school. I am going to school too" (16); "I am not a baby. / I am a big girl. / I am not going to bed. / I can go to school. / I am going to play with the children at school" (17). This series of "I" statements, each one starting on a new line so that the emphasis is on the "I," builds up dramatic intensity. One of Jenny's key statements, "I am not a baby," is repeated in childlike script within the page 17 illustration, providing both instructional support and aesthetic impact. The positioning of Jenny about to walk down stairs that are heading "off the page," suggests that she (like her brothers before her) is walking off into an adventure.

Jenny follows through on her statements and escapes while her mother thinks she is having a nap: "And away she went downstairs/ on her little bare feet./ Away she went/ in her little pink petticoat"(17). These references to her "little bare feet" and "little pink petticoat" are repeated several times and have several effects. The repetition of the word "little" maintains the separation between the school-aged reader and the pre-school hero and is a reminder that Jenny is too young for school. As a whole, the refrain subtly shifts the story into a less "real" context, framing the incident in patterned, storybook language, and creating the effect of a charm or spell.

Jenny's starting point, getting up from her afternoon nap, also allows for the possibility of this story as a dream narrative. The presence of the narrator, plus

the fairy-tale elements, the cheerful illustrations, and the repetition of key phrases (combined with the incongruity of Jenny setting out in her underwear), divert the reader from consideration of the potential dangers of her adventure.

On her quest Jenny meets first a puppy, and then a little boy, who both advise her (using the language of the refrain) to go home. Although they could be seen as helpers giving wise advice, Jenny sees them as obstacles to her quest and ignores them. McDonald has reproduced the admonitions or “warnings” of the puppy and the little boy within the illustrations, emphasising the drama of Jenny’s quest. Jenny’s status as hero changes dramatically, however, when she reaches the school. Although still in the foreground of the illustration, she now looks very small, dwarfed by the jungle gym in the foreground (suggestive of the forest of the fairy tale) and by the school building. The illustration also serves to switch the focus of the child reader towards a more realistic consideration, based on their experience, of what is likely to happen now that Jenny has arrived at school. She appears in the foreground of the double-page illustration on the following pages, but she is under the control of the teacher and almost lost within the busy detail of the classroom scene. Jenny’s stance is expectant as she waits for her older brother to acknowledge and celebrate her presence, but the illustration of pink-faced Patrick with his hunched shoulders, along with the sentence “Patrick went pink” alerts the reader to the fact that the story is not going to end as Jenny would wish. Furthermore, the “pink” of her petticoat, previously a beacon of her intention has now become associated both with her brother’s shame and the failure of her quest. The repetition of Patrick’s words “this is Jenny” in the illustration, squashed into the space between Patrick and Jenny, draws further attention to his embarrassment.

In the final two illustrations, Jenny regains her stance as hero, even as she is surrounded by adults (and Patrick) who are all focused on returning her to her rightful place. The illustrations suggest that Jenny is not overwhelmed by the failure of this particular quest, and that it will not be long before she is off on another adventure.

“Jenny Comes to School” provides many opportunities for creative participation. The quasi-fantasy elements of this story (the talking puppy, the

refrain repeated like a charm, the structure of the story as a fairy tale quest) create possibilities and questions for the reader, including the question of whether to have sympathy for Jenny's plight or not. Will she listen to the puppy and the boy? Could this really happen? How would Mother have felt when she found out that Jenny was gone? How would they themselves feel if their little brother or sister turned up at school? Was Jenny naughty? Interestingly, the suggested questions in the NZEI handbook are mostly of a literal nature ("Who wrote the story?" "Who did Jenny meet first?" "How could she get to school?") but there are two that might well prompt deeper thinking by readers: "What would you do if you saw a little girl hurrying on the road?" "How do you think Jenny's mother felt?" (75).

Wiri

Wiri, the protagonist of several stories is an intriguing character, an interesting mix of hero (in his defiance of convention, and his resolute pursuit of a goal) and the trickster character of a traditional tale.⁵⁰ He is a Māori boy in a classroom of mostly Pākehā students, and emerges as a major character because he is always getting into trouble. In "The Bluebird" Wiri "stows away" on a boat that has been brought to school. His behaviour becomes more overtly disobedient (but entertaining) in subsequent *Boat Day* stories, when he smuggles a pig into school and lets it loose as part of a circus he and his class are performing for their parents. His teacher, Miss Pennyfeather, describes him as a "naughty boy" (*Boat Day* 30 57), a "scamp" (33), and a "scallywag" (*Sliding and Flying* 87). Despite disobeying his teacher, however, Wiri has interesting ideas, and achieves success, being thanked by the parents at the circus for making them laugh (59).

The ambiguity in the characterisation of Wiri is unusual within the 1963 series. The portrayal of the teacher as kindly, imaginative, and helpful, and Wiri as disobedient and disruptive may have created something of a dilemma for students in their response to the story. There are tensions here in the contrast between their identification with Wiri as protagonist and themselves as "obedient" students, and also in the suggestion of racial stereotyping (an issue I

⁵⁰ Wiri appears in four stories in *Boat Day* ("Boat Day," "The Bluebird," "Primers Make a Circus," and "Wiri the Clown") and in "Susan in Hospital" in *Sliding and Flying*.

discuss in more detail in Chapter Eleven). In *Reading Units for the Junior School*, the suggested questions for “The Bluebird” include: “Do you think Wiri was a scamp?”; “Why did Miss Pennyfeather think he was naughty?”; and “Why was Wiri the only stowaway?” (85). The questions for the later stories, however, avoid the deeper issues of disobedience and fair treatment. Instead, they focus on less controversial aspects such as: “Why do you think Wiri made a good clown?”; “Do you think Wiri was funny?”; and “Do you think Wiri was kind to put the pig in the box?” (89-90). It is interesting to speculate as to how the students, both Māori and non-Māori, might have answered these questions and responded to Wiri as a character.

Realistic stories

In general, the Ready to Read stories lack emotional impact. While the reader might assume loving relationships between parents and children there are no glimpses (in words or pictures) of the sorts of relationships portrayed in *Are You My Mother?*, *Little Bear*, *Harry the Dirty Dog*, or *Lucy and Tom’s Day*. Even in “The Rescue” (in *Sliding and Flying*) where stranded children are reunited with their parents, there are no tears or hugs. In general, the stories focus on the humour in the predicaments, often self-created, in which the children find themselves.

The decision to focus on realistic and familiar situations in the 1963 series, while intended to help children make connections to their own experiences, restricted the sort of storylines that might be included. Without the distancing effect of surreal settings and non-human protagonists, emotionally challenging situations such as losing a parent (*Are You My Mother?*) or being rejected by loved ones (*Harry the Dirty Dog*) would have been upsetting for young readers. Instead, the stories are about characters whose experiences and adventures are contained within a safe, adult-controlled environment, or portrayed in ways that downplay potentially distressing aspects. When Timothy is lost (twice), the story is narrated from the viewpoints of Mother or Susan so that Timothy is not seen as being affected by the situation – as far as he is concerned, he is not lost. Several of the situations the characters find themselves in (being lost, riding on an escalator unsupervised, being taken away by Father Christmas in the department store) are potentially punishable, scary, or dangerous but the

illustrations maintain a light-hearted, humorous tone, steering students away from consideration of more serious consequences.

There are expressions of emotion in some stories: in “Presents from the Tree,” Anne cries when she thinks Joe Bird is gone (*The Sweet Porridge* 63) and is afraid of sliding on the nikau leaves and climbing trees (*Sliding and Flying* 60 71). In “Tootle” Judy is upset and cries at the thought of her cat stuck at the top of a telegraph pole (*Sliding and Flying* 15), and Susan wails when she is scalded (*Sliding and Flying* 83), but none of these are likely to evoke strong emotional responses in readers.

Reader engagement and creative participation

While the insistence on providing familiar, realistic content may have constrained opportunities for readers to explore “new, unexpected perspectives” (Bettelheim and Zelan 1982 260), Simpson refers often to the importance of thoughtful reading, suggesting that teachers should pose “questions that would encourage children to search the text for meanings which are implicit rather than explicit” (95). She describes the following example observed while working with a group of children reading *Playtime*. In this book, Susan asks the children playing at school if they have seen Timothy and gets the response “‘He is not here. He went away.’” Simpson reports the following interchange: “When I asked, ‘Had Timothy been there?’ a child said, ‘Yes, of course he had.’ And when I said, ‘How do you know? It doesn’t say so,’ he replied, ‘But it says “He went away,” so he must have been there’” (10).

A more complex example occurs in “Presents from the Tree” (*The Sweet Porridge*). When Anne and her family are admiring the Christmas tree they have decorated with flowers, Anne mentions that it had been “a good idea to sprinkle the flowers with water” (62). There is no previous mention of this action, requiring the reader to infer that this had happened “behind the scenes,” and make the connection between the idea of watering the flowers and the attractive appearance of the tree.

There are some stories that, while realistic, include an intriguing, possibly unintentional ambiguity that verges on fantasy. In *Saturday Morning* when the

children ask their father if he will hose them, Boxer apparently asks to be hosed too (“‘Please will you hose me?’ barked Boxer”). Again, in “Boxer Comes to School” (*The Hungry Lambs*) Boxer’s “dialogue” provides an insight into his thoughts: “‘Let me come to school,’ barked Boxer. ‘I will go with you’” (5). It could be said of both stories that the narrator is interpreting Boxer’s barking for the reader, but because Boxer is the focus of this story and consequently has more to “say,” it does seem that he is talking. As we have seen, there is a similar ambiguity in regard to the “talking” puppy in “Jenny Comes to School.”

While I have drawn attention to several examples of opportunities for thoughtful reading in the little books, some stories in the miscellanies include a more deliberate focus on the motivations of characters and provide opportunities for readers to consider events from more than one perspective. For example, Jenny in “Jenny Comes to School” is portrayed sympathetically, but we also see the impact of her actions on her mother and older brother. A further example, also in *The Hungry Lambs* is “Timothy Gets Ready”, notable for its presentation of different perspectives and lack of overt commentary.

“Timothy Gets Ready”



Figure 4.6. “Timothy Gets Ready” (39).

This story begins with a reminder from the narrator about the previous stories: “Do you remember Susan and Timothy? Do you remember Timothy on the escalator? Today they are at home with their father” (34). In a way, this opening is misleading: it suggests that this story will be in the same light-hearted vein as the earlier stories about Timothy, when in

fact it has quite a different tone. Timothy, Susan, and Father are getting ready to go to the hospital to collect Mother and their new baby. Timothy insists on getting himself ready without help but when the family arrives home from the hospital, they find water coming down the stairs from the bathroom and realise that Timothy has forgotten to turn the tap off. If this had been a “little book”, the story may have ended here, making it

another domestic misadventure, but this story continues, exploring the differing responses of the characters. The illustration on page forty shows Timothy tiptoeing out of the house, an event that is not mentioned in the written text. Father's question "Where is Timothy?" echoes the earlier stories but now, rather than looking for Timothy, Father and Susan get on with the task of cleaning up while Mother looks after the new baby. Timothy is not mentioned again for two pages, with the reader left to wonder where he might be and how he is feeling.⁵¹ The page forty-three illustration shows Timothy hesitantly poised in the kitchen doorway at teatime. His decision to come back, although possibly influenced by a desire for food, is significant and suggests a different side to his character than in the earlier books. Rather than doing what he wants regardless of consequences, Timothy is aware that he has caused a problem, but is prepared to face up to it. The story ends with Susan and Mother presenting opposing views on his behaviour, with Susan saying he is naughty, and Mother saying he was just trying to help. The teaching suggestions for this story include questions such as "Was Mother really cross with Timothy?" "If you had been Timothy how would you have felt?" "Why did Timothy run away?" (78). These open-ended questions and encouragement for students to think critically and personally about the story are unusual within the teaching suggestions for the series.

"A Dog Plays Football"

"A Dog Plays Football" is the first of two linked stories in *The Donkey's Egg*. Hemi and John are in the primers (junior classes) and watch enviously as Mr O'Donnell, a teacher, coaches the big boys in playing football (rugby). Mr O'Donnell notices Hemi and John watching and offers to coach the primer boys also. The story goes on to describe the chaos that ensues when the dog who lives next door to the school runs off with the ball. My focus here is on the beginning of the story, which is perhaps one of the more engaging examples within the series in that it

⁵¹ Simpson includes reports from an infant adviser of the responses of two students to this part of the story: "One child said, 'He's done a bunk,' and another, 'I suppose he's hopped it'" (87).

provides an insight into the thinking of the characters, and creates an emotional link with the reader:

The boys in the big school
were playing football.
Bill and Hemi just looked on.

"I wish we had a football,"
said Bill sadly.

"So do I," said Hemi,
"but there are no footballs
for the primers."

Mr O'Donnell saw them
standing there together.
He was the teacher
who coached the big boys
at football.

"I must get a football
for the primers," he thought.

The next day Mr O'Donnell
came over from the big school.

Bill saw him coming.

"Here is Mr O'Donnell
and he has a football.

Do you think it could be
for us?" he said to Hemi. (5-6)

Aesthetic appeal

We have seen how, even in the very short story *Where is Timothy?*, the careful crafting of language and illustrations creates both aesthetic impact, and opportunities for the creative participation of the reader. Instructional materials *depend* on readers being able to fill gaps within stories, because they are not able to read the words that might otherwise provide the missing information. Chapter Three demonstrates how the Ready to Read titles and cover illustrations can help guide readers into the stories, clarifying the context without the need for

scene-setting words that would be beyond the ability of beginning readers. They also provide opportunities for imagining, asking questions, and building expectations of the story.

The careful control of vocabulary and sentence structure within the little books sometimes has the effect of creating a literary quality within the text. As shown in the example above about William the Goat, this can create drama by setting up a pattern that is then broken by a change or contrast. Another example, from an earlier book, *Grandma Comes to Stay*, is shown below.

Bill and the fire engine
are in bed
Peter and the car are in bed.

The doll is in bed.
Sally is up.
Naughty Sally!

Short sentences, carefully placed line breaks, and repetition of words and sentence patterns (plus the slow and deliberate pace of the new reader), tend to create a pleasing rhythm, similar to the chanting of a nursery rhyme. The repetition of larger blocks of text creates patterns within the narrative, encouraging anticipation and delight in recognition. For example, in *Playtime*, Susan looks for Timothy in the sandpit, on the jungle gym, and in the classroom and each question and answer episode uses the same structure, similar to Baby Bird's conversations in *Are You My Mother?*

There are literary qualities in the stories for older readers, too. There are gaps to fill and a sense of drama in these opening lines to the story of "Joe Bird" (*The Sweet Porridge*), the first of six stories in which these characters appear. In very few words, this extract, along with a small illustration on the facing page, conveys the context and setting, encourages the reader to recall their own experiences of camping and summer holidays, introduces the characters, and allows the reader to anticipate the possibilities of the story, particularly the role "Joe Bird" might have to play:

Father stopped the car.

"What about this place?" he said.

"It looks a good place for a camp," said Mother.

Anne and Tony ran up a little hill.

"There is the sea," shouted Anne.

"We could go swimming." (40)

The miscellanies also feature repetition – of words, phrases, sentences, and sometimes, whole episodes. This section from "No More Swimming" (*Boat Day*) clearly conveys the despondent mood of the children when they find out that the school pool is soon to be closed: "In school no one wanted/ to look at the new books/ in the book corner./ No one wanted to paint. / No one wanted to be the grocer/ in the school shop" (8). This excerpt is interesting not only in how it conveys information implicitly (there is no actual mention of the children being sad) but also in its shared (and presumably accurate) assumption that these would normally be much-loved classroom activities.⁵²

In "The Yellow Duckling" (*The Donkey's Egg*) when Robert and his sister are hurrying home through the paddocks with an abandoned baby duck they have rescued, their "duplicate" conversations with the animals emphasise the importance and urgency of their mission: "No, little calf [lambs]," said Katy [Robert], "we must go home. We have a duckling and it is very sick" (10 11).

While, as shown above, there are instances of poetic language within the stories, strangely, the two poems in the series, "The Whale" and "The Elephant," are not mentioned by Simpson at all and only one of them ("The Whale") is mentioned in the NZEI handbook. This may suggest a degree of uncertainty about the place of poetry within an instructional reading series. In fact, the first question about "The Whale" is "Have you had a poem in your readers before?" (179). It seems that storybook reading was more of a priority for the developers of the 1963 series. This is an aspect that was to change significantly in the 1980s.

In contrast to the relatively sparse (and often aesthetically pleasing) narratives of the little books, some stories in the miscellanies suffer from excessive wordiness. There are several instances where it seems that passages of text have been "padded out", perhaps on the basis of a perceived need to provide

⁵² See Chapter Five for more about the portrayal of school life within the 1963 materials.

students with longer texts for reading “mileage,” or, perhaps, for the purpose of emphasising the New Zealand context for the stories (an aspect I discuss further in the following chapter). The introduction to “Penguin Island” (*Sliding and Flying*), a story set at “Green Bay” is a case in point. This story takes three pages (almost a quarter of the words in the entire story), along with a detailed illustration, to establish the setting, explain why Green Bay is a nice place to live, introduce the characters (who they are, what they like to do, what they like to do best) and to add the information that they have a pet bird. Certainly, when so much detail is provided, opportunities for reader engagement and creative participation may be reduced.

Another aspect that affects the level of reader engagement and interaction with many of the original stories within the miscellanies is the reduction in the number of illustrations. While the traditional tales generally have one illustration for every page of text, the ratio of illustrations to text in the original stories gradually reduces. This reduction in illustrative support may have been intended to prepare students for the next stage of instructional reading materials: the *School Journal*, which was often sparsely illustrated in the early 1960s, and chapter books.

Furthermore, the humorous interplay of text and illustrations evident in many of the little books (partly as a result of the need to convey information concisely) is largely absent from the miscellanies. With few exceptions, the illustrations tend to show only what is already stated in the narrative rather than revealing character, manipulating perspective, or adding information. The stories illustrated by Jill McDonald, however, (“Jenny Comes to School” and “‘Excuse me,’ said the Rubber” in *Sliding and Flying*), are notable for their innovative design and entertaining details, such as the inclusion of text in the illustrations. In “‘Excuse me,’ said the Rubber” the illustrations are made to look as if they have been drawn by Pencil and Rubber, adding humorous “authenticity” to the story.⁵³

⁵³ Jill McDonald also illustrated the traditional tales, “The Magpie’s Tail” (*The Donkey’s Egg*), “The Sweet Porridge” (*The Sweet Porridge*), and “My Own Self” (*The Stars in the Sky*).

In summary

It is clear that the 1963 Ready to Read series as a whole invites reader interaction and engagement. A number of the stories have similar literary features to those of the picture books discussed in Chapter Two. They are rich in humour, authentic, attractively illustrated, and (by comparison with other instructional materials of the time) innovative in their language use. The stories, especially in the little books, include opportunities for readers to “fill gaps” and interpret in their own way, although within reading lessons, this may also involve teacher mediation. They also provide many opportunities for students to develop as thoughtful and perceptive readers, to “imagine and to reason” (Simpson 10).

Yet, while engaging, these materials (and both Simpson’s handbook and the NZEI teaching suggestions) imply a relatively conservative view of young children as readers, prioritising familiarity and realism. The decision to focus on realistic stories possibly reflects an overly literal response to Beeby’s vision of materials that reflected the worlds of New Zealand children. It was also perhaps influenced by the strongly negative responses by some teachers to the fantasy stories when trialled. It seems clear that the emphasis on the familiar and the real within the 1963 materials limits the extent to which the stories explore new perspectives and encourage emotional engagement. Certainly, there is a marked discrepancy between the realistic stories in the Ready to Read series and the New Zealand fantasy writing in the *School Journal* (the next step for Ready to Read readers) over these years.⁵⁴ In fact, the *School Journal* of the 1960s provides a foretaste of how the Ready to Read series was to change in the 1980s. Several of the aspects that appeared least often or not at all in the 1963 series (poetry, child agency, first person narrators, non-fiction, and fantasy) were to become hugely significant in the revised series.

⁵⁴ 1961 marks the publication of the first of Margaret Mahy’s fantasy texts within the *School Journal*.

Chapter Five

The portrayal of a child's "own world" in the 1963 materials

In 1957, Beeby had articulated the Department of Education's vision of developing New Zealand materials for New Zealand students:

Good educational theory and our new sense of nationhood both demanded that we should begin the child's education from his own world immediately surrounding him. And that world was New Zealand, where the sun shines from the north and Christmas Day is in summer, where the farm looms larger than the factory, whose flora and fauna are foreign to the European textbook writer, where a new history began in 1776, where men and women whose cultural roots lie in the Old World yet feel a little differently about life from those who remained there.

(Wells 6)

This vision was being well represented in the New Zealand *School Journal* but not, until 1963, in the materials for younger readers. Moore (2007) describes the role of *School Journal* illustrations of New Zealand flora and fauna and representations of Māori motifs and art forms in "communicating visually the uniqueness of New Zealandness to students" (20). As we have seen in Chapter Two, conveying a distinctive national character was also an imperative for commercial picture book publishing.

The portrayal of a child's "own world" was central to the 1963 Ready to Read series, not only in conveying "a sense of nationhood" but in presenting children with material that was familiar. The materials do indeed reflect New Zealand life, and they include several of the features mentioned by Beeby (farms, summer Christmases, native flora and fauna) and by Gilderdale (*A Sea Change* 1982) in her description of the characteristics of New Zealand writing for children ("the Maoris, [...] the bush, the native birds, and [even] the hazards of rising tides" (2)). Yet in attempting to portray children's own worlds, the approach taken by the series developers was to assume a relatively homogeneous view of New Zealand children. Moore suggests that the free distribution of the *School Journal* (and by association the Ready to Read materials, as well) to all schools has the effect of

creating “an imagined audience somehow made homogeneous through virtue of being students in New Zealand schools” (19). This inevitably meant that for some children, particularly Māori children, the 1963 materials did not in fact reflect their “own worlds.”

It must be noted that Beeby’s 1957 statement with its references to cultural roots that “lie in the Old World” and New Zealand’s “new history” as starting in 1776 (the date of James Cook’s third voyage to New Zealand) seems to reflect a homogeneous view of New Zealand as a nation, privileging a “new settler” perspective over that of indigenous Māori. Beeby (1992) acknowledges that the commonly held view in the 1960s was that “New Zealand was moving towards a racially integrated population distinguishable only by skin colour, a difference that would ultimately disappear through intermarriage” (206). Hayward (2012) describes New Zealand prior to the Maori renaissance of the 1970s as being “unofficially monocultural.”⁵⁵ I track the changes in this view and the impact on the Ready to Read materials in Chapters Ten and Eleven.

In this chapter I explore some of the ways in which the developers of the 1963 materials attempted to convey New Zealand children’s “own worlds,” through the often intertwined, aspects of settings, language, storylines, and characterisation. I present an additional perspective of the portrayal of children through a comparison of the changes made to the New Zealand series when it was adapted for use in Britain by Methuen UK in 1965. As in previous chapters, the focus of my discussion here is on the original material written specifically for the series rather than the adaptations of traditional tales.

New Zealand settings

Most of the stories in the twelve little books are set at home or school. Two stories take place in department stores and one is set at a lakeside campsite. Elements likely to have been especially (although not, of course, exclusively) familiar to New Zealand five-year-olds (and often more evident in the illustrations than in the written text) include sunny weather, grassy backyards,

⁵⁵ See “Whārangī 1. From bicultural to monocultural, and back.”

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/mi/biculturalism/page-1>

garden sheds, sandpits, and picnics. Children wear “togs” (bathing costumes) or shorts and T-shirts, and play with the hose, and go barefoot. This is very different to the relatively sedate pastimes of Janet and John. Figure 5.1 shows a typical scene. (The distinctive “zigzag” weatherboard detail on the far right of the illustration is a common feature of New Zealand houses of the 1950s or later.)



Figure 5.1. *Saturday Morning*.

Of the thirty-eight stories written for the 1963 series, fifteen are set at school, clearly a familiar setting for readers, and perhaps one where children might have most in common. School is portrayed as a highly desirable place to be. In fact, three of the stories include characters who want to go to school when they are not supposed to. Two of these characters, Boxer the dog and Jenny (in “Jenny Comes to School,” as discussed in Chapter Four) do in fact get there, but are both ignominiously returned home.

The school stories include common New Zealand practices such as children starting school on or near their fifth birthday (as Timothy does in *Going to School*), children either going home from school for lunch or taking their own packed lunch to school, and schools having swimming pools.⁵⁶ The importance placed on the realistic portrayal of New Zealand school life is captured in this recollection from a teacher about Dora Ridall, one of the illustrators for the series:

⁵⁶ In the UK version of the series, most of the references to school lunches were changed, presumably because it was felt readers would be more familiar with having school dinners.

Mrs Ridall became an almost daily visitor to our school and a much-loved friend of the children and staff alike. She wished to absorb the atmosphere of the junior school in and out of the classroom to capture something of the children's experience [...] The illustrations were tested with groups of children to test their effectiveness. (May 2011 176)

Figure 5.2 shows examples of Ridall's classroom illustrations (those in the top row are from *Going to School* and those in the bottom row are from *Playtime*.)



Figure 5.2. School scenes from *Going to School* and *Playtime*.

An intriguing aspect of several of the school stories is the use Simpson appears to have made of them in trying to influence teacher practice. Both Simpson's handbook and the illustrations in these stories reflect the Department of Education's recommendations about developmental learning. Ridall's illustrations in Figure 5.2 show an almost exact representation of the following statement from Simpson's handbook:

It is impossible to assess the value of the talking, thinking, and planning that go on as children build houses, airports, and ships with blocks, boxes, and planks; improvise costumes for dancing; discuss their paintings; play on the jungle gym and in the sandpit. (18)

In other stories, Penny uses boxes to build a “school bus” and pretends to be the driver (in *A Country School*), and “No More Swimming” (*Boat Day*) includes a description of some of the everyday activities of the classroom: looking at books in the book corner, painting, and role-playing in the school shop (8). In fact, as mentioned in Chapter Four, the rejection of these activities by the children when they discover that their school pool is to be closed is used to emphasise their sadness and disappointment.

Middleton and May (1994) cite the comments of Valerie Dell, a teacher involved in trialling the Ready to Read materials, and later to become a school advisor. Dell considered the illustrations of school life to be a deliberate challenge to schools, prompting them to check that they were providing similar experiences, the implication being that schools should change their practice if this was not the case. Dell viewed this positively, describing it as “a wonderful opportunity for looking at appropriate programmes in activity time” (150).

While the class sizes and the uniformity in the age of the children in Figure 5.2 appear to show a suburban school, country schools (small schools in remote rural areas) also feature in several stories. The numbers of children were often lower in country schools, and classes with mixed age groups were common. In *A Country School*, the teacher, Mr Pitama, also drives the school bus and the story states “The school is one room. Mr Pitama is the teacher for the big children and the little children too.”

An investigation of the changes made to *A Country School* by Methuen for use in the UK helps clarify what content was considered by Methuen UK to be uniquely “New Zealand.” This story begins with pre-schooler Brian wanting to go on the school bus with his older siblings. In the New Zealand version, when Brian tries to persuade Mr Pitama to let him on the bus, he tells him he has his lunch and his book. In the UK version, the reference to lunch has been removed. There have also been changes in regard to the bus driver. It was common in 1960s New Zealand for a country school teacher to also drive the school bus but this dual role, along with the teacher’s name, was changed in the Methuen UK series.

The two versions are shown here:

New Zealand version

Here is the bus.
The teacher drives the bus.
“Hullo, Michael. Hullo, Penny,”
said Mr Pitama.

Methuen UK version

Penny laughs. “Look,” she says,
“Mr Jones is driving the bus!”
Mr Jones is the teacher.
“Hullo, Michael. Hullo, Penny,”
says Mr Jones.
“The bus driver is away.
I am the driver today.”

In the miscellanies, while home and school remain important settings, the landscape of children’s “own worlds” broadens to encompass farms, an A&P (Agricultural and Pastoral) show, hospitals, a seaside town, and areas of New Zealand coastal bush. This broadening of the range of settings, however, is less likely to have been ideologically inspired than a reflection of the wider reading vocabulary of six- and seven-year-old children compared to five-year-olds.⁵⁷

Three of the 1963 stories are set on farms. The children in “The Hungry Lambs” (who also attend a country school) forget to feed their pet lambs because they are excited about their teacher coming home with them on the school bus to have dinner at their house. In “Dabble Duck,” a sequel to the story of “The Yellow Duckling” mentioned previously, Katy comments that she knows where there is “some wool on the fence” that they can use to line the box for the duckling (16). The sight of wisps of sheep wool caught on the spikes of a barbed wire fence is still relatively common in rural New Zealand.

Some of the later stories have a more explicit, almost didactic approach to the portrayal of aspects of New Zealand life, as if the series developers wanted children to notice and appreciate New Zealand’s natural environment, outdoor lifestyle, and, to some extent, Māori heritage. In this respect, these stories reflect Gilderdale’s 1982 assertion of the earnest intention to convey “New Zealandness” implicit in New Zealand writing for children. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the opening illustration and first three pages of “Penguin Island” (*Sliding and Flying*)

⁵⁷ In suggesting this, I am drawing on many years of experience in developing instructional reading materials for children in these age groups.

provide a lengthy, detailed description of the lifestyle in Green Bay, a seaside town, including such factors as living by the beach, having an island close by, summer visitors coming to the Motor Camp, going fishing and boating, having a seagull as a pet, and, in the summer, being able to “go swimming every day” (26-28). It includes an authorial comment about Green Bay being “a good place for children to live” (26).

“The River Picnic” (*The Stars in the Sky*) includes experiences that would have been familiar to most New Zealand children, but shows them through the eyes of Tim, a boy who has recently arrived from England. Tim needs to have the word “togs” explained to him, and is surprised and delighted at his first experience of swimming and rafting in a river. This may have been intended to raise awareness in the young New Zealand reader that these aspects of New Zealand life might not be the same for children in other countries.

The most explicitly “New Zealand” examples, however, are in a set of six stories (spread over two of the miscellanies) about Tony and Anne Matthews on a Christmas camping holiday with their parents.⁵⁸ The first three linked stories centre on the preparation for and celebration of Christmas, and include several sections of explicit information about New Zealand plants. When Tony and Anne come back to the campsite with “decorations” for a fallen pine branch that the family has decided to use as a Christmas tree, their parents have a very “instructive” conversation with them (I have reproduced these excerpts as they appeared in the books, without macrons and with the same line breaks):

“Do you know what this is?”

Mother held up a branch of white flowers.

“Tea-tree,” said Anne.

“No, it is manuka,” said Tony.

“Both right,” said Father.

“Manuka is the Maori name” ...

⁵⁸ The stories, written by Helen A. Cutten and illustrated by Ian Jackson, are “Joe Bird,” “The Christmas Tree,” “Presents from the Tree” in *The Sweet Porridge* and “Sliding and Flying,” “The Pohutukawa Flowers,” and “The Rescue” in *Sliding and Flying*.

... “Look at the flax flowers,” said Anne.

She picked up some tall branches
of red flowers.

“Joe Bird will like those,” said Mother.

“Birds love to sip honey from flax flowers.” (53)

After they have decorated the Christmas tree with their finds, Father tells the children that they “want one bright thing at the top” (55) and gets something out of his fishing basket:

“What do you think these flowers are?”

“Pohutukawa,” said Tony.

“Yes, the New Zealand Christmas tree.” (56)

The attention to the New Zealand environment continues in the second set of Tony and Anne stories. These *Sliding and Flying* stories are also significant in that they provide a glimpse into Māori family life, with the introduction of Mr and Mrs Katene and their children Huki and Rata. Tony and Anne play with the Katene children, exploring rock pools, making dams, sliding down hills on nikau palm leaves, and “flying” (leaping) down the sandhills. The Katene family live by the sea, close to the camping ground, and seafood is an important part of their lives. Mrs Katene gives the Matthews family pipi (shellfish) she has gathered, and three pages (510 words) are taken up with describing the characters’ opinions of cooking, eating, and enjoying the pipi. Later, when the children find themselves stranded by the tide, Huki and Rata teach Tony and Anne Māori songs while they wait to be rescued. Mr Katene is a fisherman, and it is his prowess with rowing and manoeuvring his boat that makes the rescue possible.

Despite this dramatic conclusion, these camping stories, beautifully illustrated by Ian Jackson, seem to be almost more about the New Zealand landscape than about the characters. In the seventeen illustrations for the six stories, only three of them have the children as a focus. Instead, the dominant features are the New Zealand bush and coastal settings, as shown in Figure 5.3.



Figure 5.3. Illustrations from the Tony and Anne stories in *The Sweet Porridge*.

Another underlying theme introduced in some of these camping stories is the importance of caring for the natural environment. In “Joe Bird,” the pine branch that the Matthews family use for their Christmas tree is one that has “snapped off in last night’s wind” rather than one cut from a living tree (44). In “The Christmas Tree,” when Tony and Anne set off to find decorations, Father tells them not to pick any flowers in the bush because they will “spoil the trees” (52). When the children return with manuka flowers, Tony checks with Father: “It’s all right to pick manuka, isn’t it? It wasn’t in the bush?” and Father reassures him that it is indeed all right, and that “there is plenty of manuka” (53). In the second set of camping stories, Huki tells Tony that “it is bad to pick pohutukawa flowers” and repeats Father’s earlier admonition that it will “spoil the trees” (69). There is a similar theme in the Japanese tale “The Sticky, Sticky Pine” (also in *Sliding and Flying*), in which a poor woodcutter is rewarded for his kindness to a pine tree. The woodcutter “took care never to tear branches off a living tree, because then the sap would drip. He knew that sap is the blood of a tree and that, when the sap dripped down, the poor tree was really bleeding. That was why he would take only the branches that the wind had blown to the ground” (18).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ There is, however, an inconsistency, possibly an editing oversight, in that in “The Christmas Tree,” Father tells the children he has cut a branch off a pohutakawa tree in

Natural language

As indicated in previous chapters, the emphasis on familiar content within the materials extended to the concept of natural language, described by Leckie as meaning “language New Zealand children would naturally experience in conversation and in the course of having stories read to them” (39). A major aspect of these “natural language” texts was the incorporation of “interest words,” words that added meaning, “interest,” and depth to stories but that were not likely to be found within commonly used word lists for beginning readers. Although many of the interest words in the earliest books of the 1963 series (for example, “hungry,” “breakfast,” “fire engine,” “jungle gym,” “football”) were not unique to the experiences of New Zealand five year olds, some words *did* have more local resonance. An example is shown in Figure 5.4:

“Here is the plane,” said Father.
 “The Viscount!” shouted Bill.
 “The Viscount!” shouted Peter.



Figure 5.4. *Grandma Comes to Stay*.

New Zealand’s National Airways Corporation (NAC) was established in 1947, of huge importance for a country so remote from the rest of the world. Although air travel would not have been a common experience for children, airports and planes were of great interest. As I have discovered, if one asks almost any New Zealander who went to school in the 1960s about their recollections of the Ready to Read series, they are likely to mention the “Viscount” (introduced to NAC in 1958) in *Grandma Comes to Stay*.

order to procure a flower for the top of their own Christmas tree (*The Sweet Porridge* 56).

In the longer stories, there are many examples of interest words more strongly associated with New Zealand lifestyles. These include “creek,” “paddock,” “pet lambs,” “letter box,” “motor camp,” “long dry grass,” “sandhills,” “billy,” “Standard 2,” “primer children,” and “school bus.” The series included Māori words, such as “manuka,” “pohutukawa,” and “nikau” (names for trees), “pipi,” and characters’ names (Tai, Rangi, Mr Pitama, Wiri, Hemi, Huki, Rata, Mr and Mrs Katene). A further unique example is the term “Health Stamp,” a reference to stamps sold to raise funds for New Zealand Health Camps, established to provide for children at risk of ill health.

In the Methuen UK adaptation of the series “Viscount” became “Vanguard” (a later model, used by British European Airways from 1959); “trucks” became “vans;” “caretaker” became “school keeper;” “paddocks” became “fields;” and “pants” became “trousers.” “Standard 2” became “Class 2;” “primer children” became “little children;” and “primers” became “infant school;” “bathing costume” became “bathing trunks;” and “Health stamp” became “French stamp.” The names of the Māori characters in the little books were changed: Tai and Rangi became Nan and Terry and, as mentioned earlier, Mr Pitama became Mr Jones. Interestingly, in the miscellanies, much of the Māori vocabulary was retained. In the handbook for the Methuen series, Simpson explains the thinking behind this:

when children have reached this stage, the difference between the New Zealand scene and their own could lead to worthwhile discussion, and they could enjoy the taste of such Maori words as ‘pohutukawa,’ ‘nikau,’ and ‘manuka’ (all native trees) and the Maori names ‘Huki,’ ‘Rata,’ and ‘Katene.’ (1966 84)

Portrayals of children: Growing good citizens

Within the 1963 materials, the children are (for the most part) portrayed as resourceful, confident, and dynamic, driving the events in the stories. Many of the characters demonstrate a high level of independence. Indeed, as described in Chapters Three and Four, it is often the desire to be more independent, to do what older children are doing, that provides the narrative momentum, with the youngest child in a family (or the family dog) getting up to mischief or creating a

problem. Some characters, such as Timothy, Jenny, and Wiri stand out for their more extreme sense of adventure and disdain for rules.

In general, children are depicted as being practical and capable: Tai, Rangi, and Timothy work together at school to build an “airport,” Penny builds and “drives” a school bus, Jenny makes her own way to school, and Robert takes care of Dabble Duck. Tony and Anne go into the bush by themselves to find Christmas decorations, and in “Presents from the Tree,” it is clear that they have worked together to make Christmas presents for their parents, keeping them secret until Christmas Day (*The Sweet Porridge* 63-65). (Anne gives Mother a picture she has painted in a frame that Tony has made at school. Tony has also made a pine-cone owl with button eyes and Anne has made a bag to keep Father’s matches dry when he goes fishing.)

The Ready to Read stories reflect almost exactly the aspirations of the Department of Education for New Zealand children as expressed by Arnold Campbell, chief inspector of primary schools, in 1956:

We want children to be healthy and physically vigorous, and, if possible, happy; to live their lives fully and significantly as children; and to grow up into men and women who are generous, self-disciplined, and emotionally stable, willing to shoulder their responsibilities and equipped to do so, able to give and take freely with others (and yet with their own inner resources), attractive and interesting as persons, mentally alert, clear-headed, and with an effective grasp of the tools of learning, and some understanding of their natural and social worlds. They should have creative interests of some kind, and good, if simple standards of taste. We want them also to have a firm appreciation of the values of their society, and a readiness to defend them, and with this, some awareness of the shortcomings of their society and a desire to improve it. Finally, we would wish them to be people of integrity and courage, with

enough moral toughness to do unpleasant duties and a willingness to make sacrifices for ends bigger than themselves.
(n.p.)⁶⁰

Overall, however (as discussed in Chapter Four), children act within a framework of guidance and supervision by adults (parents, teachers, a policeman), and several of the stories end with an adult comment or reaction. *Grandma Comes to Stay* ends with the narrator's comment "Naughty Sally," inviting the reader to agree that Sally should not have got out of bed. Timothy's adventure in *Where is Timothy?* ends with his having to return his "borrowed" hat to the sales assistant; Mother tells Richard he is naughty for spraying the family with the hose in *Saturday Morning*; and the horrified reaction of Mother and Father to Mark's attempt to help is the focus of the final illustration in *Painting the Shed* (as shown in Figure 4.1). Jenny is taken back home from school by her mother, Wiri is chastised (several times) by his teacher, and Father gives extensive safety advice to the children at the end of "Susan in Hospital. "Forgetful Andy" (*The Stars in the Sky*) includes the statement, "Andy was a good boy but he did forget things. That is why this story is called 'Forgetful Andy'" (44), and the story, although humorous, is about Andy's mother's attempt to teach Andy a lesson. In general, the humour or drama within the stories relies to a large extent on readers' willingness to accept the importance of knowing and following rules, and on the assumption that adults know best. This degree of adult control over children's behaviour is one aspect that changed markedly when the series was revised.

In an interesting contrast, however, the characters in the camping stories have a surprising amount of independence. As we have seen, in "Joe Bird," Father suggests the children go off by themselves into the bush to look for Christmas tree decorations, and Tony mentions using his knife to cut the flax flowers and toi-toi (52-53). In "The Pohutukawa Flowers" the children are allowed to explore the rocky coast line without adult supervision.

⁶⁰ Ewing (1970) includes Campbell's statement as part of the front matter in *The Development of the New Zealand Curriculum*. (In 1960, Campbell succeeded Beeby as Director of Education.)

While independence is encouraged in the camping stories, Wiri's boldly independent behaviour in the *Boat Day* stories and *Sliding and Flying* is portrayed less positively. As discussed in Chapter Four, Wiri, a Māori boy in a classroom of mostly Pākehā students, is perhaps the most dynamic and resourceful character in the 1963 series, though also ideologically problematic. His deliberate and persistent disregard for his teacher's instructions is a stark contrast to the behaviour of any other Ready to Read character, and seems perhaps indicative of stereotypical views of Māori, current in the 1960s. I explore these views and the implications for the portrayal of Māori children within the series in Chapter Eleven.

The generally constrained view of children's lives, and affirmation of adult control may have been a reflection of the awareness by the Department of Education of the wide reach of the resources they produced for schools. In 1957 Beeby had cautioned that

a publication produced by a government department is peculiarly vulnerable to criticism. An apparently harmless phrase in a school book may offend a large section of the community or may bring the whole publication into the realm of politics. (Wells 6)

Beeby almost certainly would have had in mind the furore the Department had experienced over the publication of stories by Brian Sutton-Smith in the 1949 *School Journal*. As a teacher of eight-year-olds, Sutton-Smith had noticed a lack of realistic New Zealand fiction for his students and had decided to write some himself. The publication of his first three stories (about the suburban adventures of a gang of boys) in the *School Journal* drew strong criticism from some teachers, objecting to the boys' use of slang and their uncivilised behaviour (for example, sneaking into a picture theatre without paying). Ewing (1970) refers to this "attempt of the School Publications Branch in 1949 to provide children with an example of veracious writing" as being ahead of the times. He went on to say that although "the author explained in *Education* that the stories were 'a means of making a closer moral contact with a Standard 3 class,' they drew strong protest

from some teachers, mainly on the grounds of their ‘bad example’ and after three episodes the series was cut short” (220).⁶¹

Girls and boys

The 1963 materials show clear evidence of gender stereotyping, reflective of social attitudes of the period (later to become one of the driving forces behind the 1980s revision of the series). When Grandma brings presents (in *Grandma Comes to Stay*), Bill gets a fire engine, Peter a car, and Sally a doll.⁶² In general, girl characters in the 1963 series are assigned domestic roles, often being expected to look after younger siblings. Mother tells Susan to look after Timothy in *Where is Timothy?* and Susan is the one who goes looking for Timothy in *Playtime* when he disappears again. In *Christmas Shopping* and *Painting the Shed*, Helen behaves responsibly and reliably but is eclipsed in the stories by the non-compliant (and much more entertaining) behaviour of her younger brother Mark. In *At the Camp*, Mother decides that Penny will help her make the beds, while Michael helps Dad put up the tent and goes fishing. Similarly, in “Joe Bird,” Anne and Mother make the beds, while Tony and Father put up the tent. In these camping stories, Anne is portrayed as being timid and emotional: she cries when she thinks Joe Bird is gone (*The Sweet Porridge* 63) and in the *Sliding and Flying* stories, she is scared about sliding on the nikau leaves and climbing a tree (60 71). In “Tootle” (*Sliding and Flying*) Judy cries at the thought of her cat stuck at the top of a telegraph pole (15). In *Boat Day*, when the children decide to put on a circus for the parents, Wiri wants to be a clown, David wants to be the ringmaster, and Betty wants to wear her new dancing dress and be the dancing girl (38). And it is only ever the boys who get to play football.

⁶¹ The three stories (and others) were later published as a book *Our Street* (1950) by A. H. & A. W. Reed. The book includes a “publisher’s note” referring to the controversy along with articles by A. M. Davidson, an intermediate school principal, Dorothy White, a former librarian and author of *About Books for Children* (1946), and Sutton-Smith himself.

⁶² Margaret Mahy singles out this story as an example of gender stereotyping in a 1974 article (see Chapter Ten).

Mothers, too, reflect 1960s conventions, and are commonly portrayed carrying out domestic tasks (often wearing aprons). They keep the households running smoothly, provide meals, care for the children, take them to school, and go shopping, while fathers go out to work and show their children how to build rafts, go fishing, and put up tents.

The differentiation of gender roles in the New Zealand materials is, however, less extreme than in the one story added to the series by Methuen UK. “The Wigwam” was written by Richard Wiggs (illustrated by Sonia Robinson) as a replacement for two of the New Zealand stories, “A Dog Plays Football” and “Presents from Hugo” in *The Donkey’s Egg*.⁶³ This UK story also stands out for the extent of parental intervention in the activities of the children.

The two discarded New Zealand stories are set at school. Hemi and John are in the primers and watch enviously as Mr O’Donnell, a teacher, coaches the older boys in playing football (rugby). Mr O’Donnell notices them watching and offers to coach the younger boys, making them some goal posts when they have learned to kick, throw, and catch. One day, while the boys are playing football, Hugo, the dog next door, runs off with the ball. Pursued, Hugo runs into the classroom and creates havoc, but after the children have cleaned up, Hugo’s owner arrives with a new football for the boys and an aquarium for the girls. These stories are perhaps some of the more engaging of the realistic New Zealand stories within the series. The context is authentic and believable, the children initiate events and work hard for what they want, and Hugo’s intervention adds an entertaining level of complication and chaos. Furthermore, the stories feature a Māori child (Hemi) in a positive, leading role. The stories also fit well thematically within the New Zealand series. They revisit the motifs of young children wanting to emulate older children (as in *Playtime*, *Painting the Shed*, *A Country School*, “Jenny Comes to School,” and “Timothy Gets Ready”), of dogs creating mischief (*At the Camp*, “Boxer Comes to School”), and of wild chases involving animals (*The Pet Show*, “Wiri the Clown,” “A Donkey at School”).

⁶³ See Chapter Four for an extract from the opening pages of “A Dog Plays Football.”

It is interesting to speculate as to why these stories were replaced in the UK series. Perhaps the combined impact of elements such as a country school setting, children with bare feet, the focus on boys and rugby, the informality of the relationship between Mr O'Donnell and the children, and perhaps even the chaos created by the dog, were thought too uniquely New Zealand. Certainly, the replacement story is different in many respects.

"The Wigwam" describes how Joan's father helps Joan and her friend, Bruce, make a wigwam.⁶⁴ The story begins with Joan wanting to have a tent like the one her neighbour Tom has in his front yard. Joan has a problem, however: "Tom was a big boy and he did not ask Joan to play with him" (4). Father suggests he and Joan make their own tent, prompting Joan to say, "I bet we can make a better tent than Tom's" (5). This introduces an element of competitiveness, absent from any of the New Zealand stories (in fact, both "A Dog Plays Football" and "Presents from Hugo" are notable for their focus on co-operation and thoughtfulness). In addition to this contrast in motivation, the roles of the children are very different. As mentioned earlier, in the New Zealand stories (not just the two discarded stories but in many of the others as well), it is the children who have agency and drive the action. Yet in this story, Joan's father is the one who dominates. He makes the decisions, gives instructions, does most of the construction, answers the children's questions, and solves the problems that arise. He is also prominent in the illustrations – he appears in six of the seven illustrations that show Joan and by himself in one (trimming the sticks they will use for the wigwam, as shown in Figure 5.5). This trimming of the sticks provides another interesting contrast with the depiction of children in the New Zealand stories. As mentioned previously, in "The Christmas Tree" (a story retained by Methuen UK within the same miscellany as the one including "The Wigwam") Tony uses his knife to cut flax flowers and toi-toi (*The Sweet Porridge* 53). In "The Wigwam," however, it is Father who "cut off all the little bits with his axe" while the children just collect them and put them in a heap (8-9).

⁶⁴ Although the story uses the term "wigwam," the illustrations show they actually build a teepee.

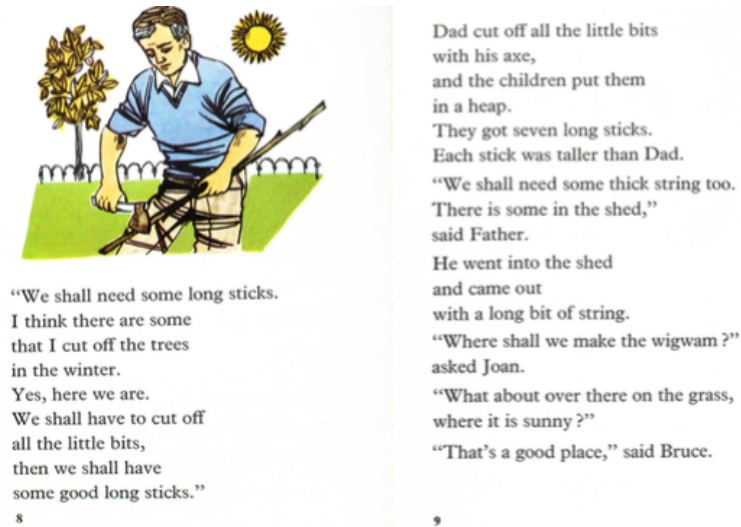


Figure 5.5. Father dominating the action in "The Wigwam" (8-9).



Figure 5.6. Bruce wearing a hairband, "The Wigwam" (15).

When the wigwam is finished, Joan comments that it is "much better than Tom's old tent," and that they "can be Red Indians now" (12). Their dressing up here, as well as involving cultural appropriation, provides a further example of gender stereotyping. When Joan asks Bruce if he would like to wear one of her hair-bands as

part of the "Red Indians" role-play, Bruce replies, "Me wear a girl's hair-band? I don't know about that" (14). Eventually Bruce does decide to wear the band, saying, "I am the Indian brave and you are the squaw" (14). This interchange is accompanied by an illustration of Bruce wearing the hairband (shown in Figure 5.6) where he does (though, perhaps, unintentionally) look very much like a girl. It is interesting to note that Bruce has dispensed with the hairband in all subsequent illustrations.

The conservatism underpinning this story in regard to gender roles and child agency extends even to the illustrations, which lack the dynamism of those in the stories they replaced. Although it seems like there has been an attempt to replicate some of the features of the original Ready to Read illustrations

(colourful with black outlines and sketchy details, children with bare feet and casual clothing), the illustrations in “The Wigwam” are more precise and detailed, have finer outlines, and the characters are dressed very tidily. An interesting



Figure 5.7. Bare-chested Bruce, “The Wigwam” (21).

exception occurs in the final illustration (shown in Figure 5.7) in which Bruce has a bare chest. Although this fits with the “Red Indians” theme, it seems a little surprising in view of the conservatism in the rest of the story. Perhaps the writer (or editor) felt that this bare chest needed some justification, and has added an explanation: “‘This fire is hot,’ said Bruce and he took his shirt off” (20).

In summary

The contrast between “The Wigwam” and the New Zealand stories it replaced, particularly in regard to the relatively minor roles of the child characters in the former, helps bring into focus the unique view of children’s own worlds within the 1963 Ready to Read series. Simpson had emphasised the need for the stories to reflect what was familiar to children and, for the most part, the series does indeed seem to have done this. Although there are stereotypical elements within the New Zealand series, overall the stories reveal a credible, engaging, and positive view of children and their interactions within a range of typically New Zealand settings. The stories are generally humorous and lighthearted, in contrast to the conservative and somewhat pedestrian tone of “The Wigwam.”

The development of an instructional series by the Department of Education intended for all New Zealand students, however, inevitably involved some compromise in regard to the portrayal of New Zealand children and their lives. The 1963 materials were trialled in thirty-three schools (including three Māori schools), allowing for some input by teachers and students, but the final outcome, although undoubtedly realistic for many children, was certainly not representative of all. The characters in the 1963 Ready to Read stories are almost exclusively Pākehā, and most of the Māori characters who do appear have

minor roles. Wiri, in the *Boat Day* stories, is a notable exception, but he is characterised as being disobedient and mischievous. There is a similarly narrow representation of family structures. The families that feature in the stories are all two-parent, nuclear families, with Grandma in *Grandma Comes to Stay* being the only example that overlaps with the Māori concept of whānau (extended family).⁶⁵ In their feedback as part of the 1975 national evaluation of the series (and as part of a request for more variety in the series), the Canterbury District went so far as to describe the twelve little books as “backyard fiction for middle class families”. The need for a more realistic and up-to-date representation of aspects such as family structures, ethnicity, gender roles, and cultural settings were key drivers for the major revision of the series in the 1980s.

⁶⁵ There is no mention of a father in “Jenny Comes to School” but in the social context of the 1960s, the assumption is that he would have been at work.

Chapter Six

Revising the Ready to Read series

The 1963 materials had proved effective in helping children learn to read, but, over the next decade, teachers had come to feel that the books were becoming dated and lacking in appeal. This criticism may have been occasioned in part by the very effectiveness of the materials. As teachers became more familiar and adept with the new ways of teaching reading that the books allowed for (in particular, reading for meaning), they were raising their expectations of what instructional materials could offer. In 1975, the Department of Education undertook a national evaluation of the 1963 materials. This involved the distribution of questionnaires, followed by meetings of teachers, advisers, school inspectors, and departmental officers. While much of the feedback about the series was positive, particularly in regard to its success in helping children learn to read, the overall responses confirmed concerns about relevance for some children, an imbalance in the portrayal of New Zealand lifestyles and gender roles, and a lack of impact in “illustrations, language, and variety of content and format” (Leckie 40).

A weeklong conference organised by the Department of Education to consider the feedback resulted in a set of recommendations for change, the main one being that “the series and support material be systematically revised, expanded and extended as a continuing process” (Leckie 39-40). Accordingly, a “Ready to Read Revision and Extension Project” (RRRE) was established. As indicated by the feedback from the national evaluation, key considerations for the revised materials were that they should “present material close to the interests and experience of young children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, home circumstances, and locations” (*Reading in Junior Classes* 85) and that the books should be able to “take their place alongside the best of children’s picture books” while continuing “to be part of a graded reading series” (83).⁶⁶ From 1982 to 1988 an astonishing variety of materials was published. Almost as significant as

⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier, *Reading in Junior Classes* (1985) was the handbook written to accompany the revised series.

the materials was the revision process itself in its extensive involvement of stakeholders including teachers, students, and interested community groups.

As indicated in Chapter One, it is clear from Department of Education communications to schools over the period of the revision that the process took longer than expected. Although *Reading in Junior Classes* refers to 1985 as the end of the process (7), the intense period of new publishing continued until 1988 with the publication of *Dog Talk*, the last of the seven new miscellanies. It is the set of materials published between 1982 and 1988 that I refer to in this thesis as the revised Ready to Read series.

In this chapter, I examine the factors that prompted the revision of the series, the revision process itself, and the outcomes. I discuss literary and socio-cultural aspects of the materials in subsequent chapters.

The social and cultural context

The review and revision of the Ready to Read series took place in a dynamic period of New Zealand social history, particularly in regard to biculturalism and women's rights. New Zealand's population was becoming increasingly diverse. While rates of European immigration were slowing, there were high levels of immigration from the Pacific. King (2003) notes that by the end of the decade, the population contained nearly 100,000 Pacific Islanders (467-68). Another significant feature of population change was the acceleration of Māori urbanisation, meaning that many Pākehā were coming into close contact with Māori for the first time (470). While the movement of Māori away from traditional rural communities into towns and cities initially created problems of dislocation and loss of Māori culture and language, the 1970s marked the beginning of a self-led Māori cultural "renaissance," addressing longstanding issues concerning the loss of lands as well as language.

Swarbrick (2013) describes a growing awareness of and respect for Māori culture, both by Māori and Pākehā. While Māori arts and crafts had long been a feature of New Zealand classrooms, aspects of tikanga (protocol) and Māori language began to be taught and practised in some schools and workplaces, and

some schools built their own marae.⁶⁷ King observes that throughout the 1970s “the country was making a gradually stronger commitment to biculturalism in Maori-Pakeha relations, and to multiculturalism” (467). The focus of government policy shifted in the mid-1970s from integration to multiculturalism (Dunstall 1981 426). In 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal was set up to investigate breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, in particular those relating to Māori land. There was also increasing government recognition of Māori language and cultural practices.⁶⁸ Outcomes in the 1980s included the opening of the first kōhanga reo (Māori-language early childhood education centre or “language nest”) in 1982, and the first Māori-medium school in 1985. Māori was made an official language of New Zealand in 1987.⁶⁹

Oliver (1981) characterises the 1970s as a time of “heightened intensity of social concern” (458). Women’s rights were a particular focus, with the women’s liberation movement flourishing. King estimates that by 1972, there were about twenty women’s groups established around New Zealand, and biennial United Women’s Conventions were held from 1973 to 1979 (462).⁷⁰ 1975 was designated by the United Nations as International Women’s Year, commemorated in part within New Zealand by a feature in *Education* entitled “Women in 1975” in which women, including Margaret Mahy and senior school students, were invited to share their views about women’s roles.⁷¹ The number of women in paid employment rose steadily, with the wider provision of daycare services enabling women with children to return to work (King 463). The

⁶⁷ “Manners and social behaviour.” <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/manners-and-social-behaviour>.

⁶⁸ Oliver, in *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (1981), states rather more cynically that politicians (along with publicity agents and media people) “fell over their feet trying to incorporate Maori elements” (460).

⁶⁹ See also Royal (2005), “Māori” <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori> and Derby (2011), “Māori-Pākehā relations” <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-pakeha-relations>.

⁷⁰ See also Cook (2011) “Women’s movement.” <https://teara.govt.nz/en/womens-movement/page-6>.

⁷¹ *Education* vol. 24, no. 9, 1975, pp. 2-18.

introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) in 1974 made it easier for women with children to manage as single-parent families.

One outcome of the women's movement was to focus attention on gender roles and stereotyping within educational materials. Baker and Freebody (1986), studying the construction of identity in beginning school reading books, note the often negative impact of school books in conveying to children "how the adult social world is and should be organised" (56). A great deal of research, both nationally and internationally, was carried out into sex-role stereotyping in instructional reading materials. Two key pieces of New Zealand research were *First Sex, Second Sex* (Dunedin Collective for Women 1973) and *run, john, run watch, janet, watch* (Wainwright, Robinson, and Aitken 1975).

The educational environment in the 1970s

Ballantyne (2009) describes 1970s New Zealand as characterised by "a blossoming of interest, excitement, and confidence amongst literacy educators" (22). The two main professional publications for teachers, *National Education* and *Education*, testify to the strong sense of partnership and shared purpose between practitioners and policy makers, with ideas about teaching and learning widely shared and debated. School advisory and inspectorate services within the Department of Education facilitated communication between teachers and Department personnel. School inspectors in particular played a key role in the recognition and support of innovative practice. District Senior Inspectors were central to the 1975 national evaluation of the Ready to Read series, facilitating meetings with teachers to discuss their responses and collating the summaries in their districts. Don Holdaway, an influential New Zealand educator (discussed later in this chapter) describes the encouragement and support provided by the Department of Education for the work he and his colleagues were doing in Auckland, including "providing opportunities for grass-roots research and development" (*The Foundations of Literacy* 1979 8). He comments that "[p]erhaps only in a country of the size of New Zealand could such a set of facilitating conditions be created and sustained through all parts of the system in a spirit of fraternity and genuine commitment to children" (8).

Within the Department of Education, the legacy of C. E. Beeby (described in previous chapters) remained strong, and senior roles continued to be filled by people with extensive experience within the education system. Examples include Arnold Campbell (Beeby's successor as Director of Education), Neil Leckie, the author of the 1984 UNESCO report, who was a former Director of the Early Childhood Division, Bryan Pinder, Director of Primary Education, and Bill Renwick, Director-General 1975-88.

In these years, New Zealand's education system and its provision of instructional materials to schools, including the role of the School Publications Branch, was also highly regarded internationally. Beeby himself had played an important role in lifting New Zealand's international profile. During his twenty years as New Zealand Director of Education (1940-60), Beeby had maintained an active role within UNESCO, and in 1948-49 he had been seconded to the post of UNESCO Assistant Director General. In 1968, while Commonwealth visiting professor at the University of London Institute of Education, he was described by the National Union of Teachers as "one of the most distinguished educational administrators in the world."⁷² New Zealand's reputation was further enhanced when its secondary students topped the world in the 1973 International Reading Achievement survey (Guthrie 1981).⁷³ As mentioned in Chapter Three, New Zealand's provision of textbooks and reading materials was the focus of a 1983 UNESCO regional seminar. A three-volume report of the seminar was published jointly by the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific and the New Zealand Department of Education. Volume One, written by Neil Leckie, focused on the "New Zealand Style" of teaching reading, and on the revision of the Ready to Read series.

Leckie's UNESCO report describes the "New Zealand style" of teaching reading as being based on the understanding that making meaning is the primary purpose of reading, and that reading is part of a whole-language approach to

⁷² Reported in "Beeby's Law ... Good Education Always Costs More than Bad," *National Education*, vol. 50, no. 541, 1968, p. 110.

⁷³ This achievement was reported in *National Education*, vol. 55, no. 600, 1973, p. 214) under the headline, "NZ pupils have highest reading comprehension of 15 countries."

learning that builds on each child's experiences and interests (26-28). Although the term "whole language" has come to be interpreted in many different ways, in 1970s and 1980s New Zealand, it described an holistic philosophy of learning and teaching that is "essentially child-centred, driven by children's interests, with a dominant emphasis on gaining meaning from the outset" (Smith and Elley 1997 46).

This whole language approach was, in essence, what the New Zealand Department of Education had been advocating since the 1960s. This is evident in Department publications, including Simpson's 1962 Ready to Read handbook and the 1963 materials themselves, with their prioritising of familiar content, natural language, and meaningful stories. Marie Clay's theory of reading processing (*Reading: The Patterning of Complex Behaviour* 1972) and her subsequent development of Reading Recovery as an intervention for children experiencing reading difficulty are also grounded on the concept of reading as a process of constructing meaning.

In the 1970s and 1980s, two key proponents of the whole language approach in the United States were the psycholinguists Ken Goodman and Frank Smith. Goodman had carried out his initial research into early reading at the same time as Clay, and had reached similar conclusions in regard to the essential role of meaning in learning to read. In a 1992 article ("I didn't found whole language") he refers to New Zealand as having "a continuous history of progressive education going back to the 1930s," with the New Zealand school system being child centered, and "receptive to a view of reading as holistic and meaning seeking" (194). He refers specifically to Clay's research and to Don Holdaway's pioneering of "big books" for shared reading, with many of these being imported into the United States from New Zealand (195). In a 1987 article, "Reading Acquisition: The 'Great Debate,'" published in *Reading Forum NZ*, Goodman described *Reading in Junior Classes* as "one of the best guides for teaching children to read ever produced" (10).

Unsurprisingly, the dynamic nature of the New Zealand education system at this time was associated with a high level of interest and shared knowledge about early reading instruction. An Auckland council of the International

Reading Association was established in 1963, followed by the establishment of councils in many other regions. In 1970, the first New Zealand annual national reading conference was held, and in 1983, a National Reading Association, affiliated to the International Reading Association was formed.⁷⁴ Renwick, in a 1979 article, “The Way Ahead in Reading,” acknowledged the importance of reading associations in making “the many people who have a community of interest in reading ... visible to one another,” writing, “I have long looked on the International Reading Association as the answer to an administrator’s prayer. If anyone were to ask the question: ‘Who are the friends of reading in New Zealand?’ a suitable answer would be: ‘The people who attend I.R.A. conferences’” (10).

The 1970s also saw the provision of a national Early Reading In-Service Course (ERIC) by the Department of Education. Teachers attended weekly after-school sessions to work through modules on various aspects of reading instruction, with a facilitator available either during the session, or in schools. The ERIC course was perhaps the most extensive and successful example of teacher professional development that has ever occurred in New Zealand. Leckie estimates that by 1984, 20,000 teachers had taken the course (57).⁷⁵ A further factor that helped build knowledge of early reading instruction in schools was the flow-on effect within schools from the intensive training of school-based Reading Recovery teachers, which began in 1979.⁷⁶

Once the trialling process for the revised Ready to Read materials began (which I describe later in this chapter), this too came to be seen as a valuable

⁷⁴ The New Zealand Reading Association changed its name to the New Zealand Literacy Association in 2013. For further information see “The History of NZLA”

<http://nzla.org.nz/about/our-history/the-history-of-nzla/>

⁷⁵ The ERIC courses were discontinued in the early 1980s. The technology for delivering the courses had become outdated and it was decided to shift the focus to developing a similar course, LARIC (Later Reading In-Service Course) for teachers of older students.

⁷⁶ As described in Chapter Three, Reading Recovery is an intensive individualised teaching intervention, developed by Marie Clay, for students making slowest progress in learning to read. See Ballantyne (2009 26-30) for a summary of the establishment of Reading Recovery in New Zealand.

source of professional development. Leckie states that “the structure set up to carry out the revision and extension project, and the processes inherent in it, have ensured that the whole exercise has had, and continues to have, a major in-service training function” (49). He cites the involvement of junior class teachers in the 1975 evaluation of the series, the nationwide introduction of ERIC from the beginning of 1978 with its associated training of resource teachers, and awareness of the pending revision of the *Ready to Read* series as “heightening interest in reading materials at the junior classes level” (58). Certainly the trialling process required teachers to think carefully about students’ reading behaviours, the characteristics of texts, and about their own teaching practice as they observed the students’ responses to the new materials.

In addition to widespread professional development within the education sector, the Department of Education also sought ways of disseminating ideas about early reading to the wider community. One approach, in 1978, was the delivery of a series of radio programmes (by the Department in partnership with Radio New Zealand) called “On the Way to Reading”. These programmes discussed how parents could support their pre-school children’s learning. The programmes were accompanied by booklets for use within community discussion groups (Leckie 24-5).

Influential educators

As acknowledged by Holdaway, within this dynamic and generally well-informed educational community, there was also an openness on the part of the Department of Education to innovation in teaching. School inspectors played a key role in recognising and supporting effective innovative practices. Three New Zealand practitioners notable for their ideas about teaching in these years were Elwyn Richardson, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and Don Holdaway himself.

Richardson’s 1964 book, *In the Early World*, describes his experiences teaching at a small country school in Northland in the 1950s, where he, with the approval of the Department of Education, dispensed with much of the official curriculum and instead created an integrated curriculum of creativity (arts, crafts, drama, and writing) based around children’s experiences and observation of the world around them. *In the Early World* attracted national and international

attention as a flagship for progressive education, and was widely used in New Zealand teacher training colleges in the 1960s and 1970s (MacDonald 2016 3). The willingness of the Department to allow Richardson the freedom to experiment (and the initial recognition by school inspectors of the potential of Richardson's teaching methods) exemplifies the mood of the time, and the receptiveness to new ideas.

Like Richardson, Ashton-Warner focused on the importance of valuing and using children's own experiences and language.⁷⁷ Her theory of "organic teaching," developed through her experience of teaching in Māori schools, involved helping children to use their own "key vocabulary" (words of particular personal significance) to write stories about their lives. Although having students write and read their own stories was a common teaching practice, Ashton-Warner went further in asserting that children should be encouraged to share very personal experiences (of, for example, death or violence) and use words associated with deep emotions (such as love or fear), and that teachers should not censor children's writing.

Ashton-Warner's philosophy, persuasively conveyed in her writing in the 1950s and 1960s, had won her many adherents both within and beyond New Zealand, particularly in the United States, but it made little headway with the Department of Education at the time. While, according to Hood (1988), strong interest was expressed by Beeby and other Department officials in Ashton-Warner's work, Ashton-Warner proved difficult to work with. It was not until many years later that there appears to have been a greater resonance between the principles of whole-language education and Ashton-Warner's ideas. While there is no mention of Ashton-Warner in the 1962 *Ready to Read* handbook, her 1963 book *Teacher* is cited in the section on "language experience teaching" in *Reading in Junior Classes* (67-68).

Of the three practitioners mentioned here, Holdaway, a Reading Adviser and later a lecturer at Auckland Teachers' College, had the most direct impact on the

⁷⁷ Ashton-Warner wrote about her teaching philosophy in a series of eight articles in *National Education* between December 1955 and October 1956 and in her books *Spinster* (1958) and *Teacher* (1963).

revision of the Ready to Read series. In addition to publishing influential books for educators, *Independence in Reading* (1972) and *The Foundations of Literacy* (1979), and being a key contributor to the ERIC materials, Holdaway played a leading role in developing the “Shared Book Experience” approach, nowadays commonly referred to as shared reading. This approach involves the teacher reading enlarged copies of high-interest picture books with children in order that they might follow the text and join in the reading, while at the same time learning about the conventions of print and stories. Holdaway developed the Shared Book Experience as a way of reproducing the pleasure and learning opportunities of the bedtime reading experience, helping children develop a “literacy set” (his term for basic knowledge about reading and book language). This was of particular importance for children with limited access to books, or for whom English was not a first language, including children whose families had immigrated to New Zealand from the Pacific Islands. In the 1970s, Holdaway established a highly successful collaboration with Ashton Scholastic to publish “big books” for both national and international markets (as referred to by Goodman in his 1992 article cited earlier in this chapter). Several other publishers of educational materials also began producing enlarged “readalong” books of poems, songs, or stories told in rhyme, examples being *The Story Box* series (Shortland Publications) and *PM Readalongs* published by Price Milburn.⁷⁸

Holdaway’s influence on the 1980s revision of the Ready to Read series is apparent in the series developers’ decision to develop materials specifically for shared reading (poem cards and big books), and, possibly, in the practice of teachers introducing the graded materials through shared reading before having students read them in guided reading lessons.⁷⁹ The high level of support

⁷⁸ While big books were produced commercially, it was also common practice for teachers to make their own enlarged versions of popular picture books. Holdaway (1979) includes several photographs of children reading these teacher-made big books and responding to “the total environment of literary pleasure and aesthetic excitement” (73, facing page).

⁷⁹ While this practice is advocated in *Reading in Junior Classes*, it has been difficult to trace how shared reading changed from being an approach to use with “big books” that

provided to readers through shared reading meant that the series developers were not as constrained by considerations of text difficulty, and as I shall show, they used this new freedom to take the series in a much more literary direction than had been the case with the 1963 materials.

The literary environment

The 1960s and 1970s had seen many dramatic changes in commercial picture book publishing, both nationally and internationally. In 1963, the same year as the Ready to Read series was introduced to New Zealand schools, Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* was published. Here was a book featuring a real child, albeit in a wolf suit, confronting important ideas and emotions – anger, fear, loneliness, love. *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins, which, with its humorous contrast between the stories told in the text and the illustrations, was also to become an icon of literature for young children, was published in 1971. These years also saw an increase in publishing of books featuring rhythmic chants and rhymes, such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?* by Bill Martin Junior (1967), or with highly repetitive structures, such as Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) and John Burningham's *Mr Gumpy's Outing* (1970). These were exactly the sorts of texts that Holdaway was advocating as being ideal for shared reading. Also, as discussed in previous chapters, Early Readers such as *The Cat in the Hat*, *Are You My Mother?*, and *Little Bear* had proven their popularity with young readers, and clearly demonstrated the possibilities of creating relatively simple texts with lively language and storylines.

Within New Zealand, too, picture book publishing was beginning to gain momentum. *The Boy and the Taniwha* by Ron Bacon, illustrated by Māori artist Para Matchitt, was published in 1966, followed by *Rua and the Sea People* in 1968. In 1969, five of Margaret Mahy's fantasy stories that had first appeared in the 1960s *New Zealand School Journal* were published as picture books, suddenly placing a New Zealand children's author (though not, in these early Mahy books, New Zealand content) on the world stage. Mahy's *A Lion in the*

children would learn to read independently after many shared readings, to its use in reading small books that were then to be used for guided reading.

Meadow won the national Esther Glen Award in 1970. Joy Cowley, another prolific writer for the New Zealand *School Journal*, also had her first picture book, *The Duck and the Gun*, illustrated by Edward Sorel, published in 1969.⁸⁰

1972 marked the publication of the first picture book by a Māori writer (*Maui and the Big Fish* by Katarina Mataira).⁸¹ Mataira's second book, *Maori Legends for Young New Zealanders*, illustrated by Clare Bowes, was published in 1975. In 1973, *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes*, written by Eve Sutton and illustrated by New Zealander Lynley Dodd, was published. Successful in Canada and the United Kingdom, this lively rhyming repetitive book won the Esther Glen Award in 1975. In 1976, Lynley Dodd began writing and illustrating her own books and, in 1983, Hairy Maclary made his debut in *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy. The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* by Ronda Armitage, illustrated by David Armitage (and also published internationally) won the 1978 Esther Glen award.

Other New Zealand publishing milestones included, in 1973, the publication of the first bilingual picture book, *Crayfishing with Grandmother*, with English text by Jill Bagnall and Māori text by Hapi Potae.⁸² *The Kuia and the Spider* by Patricia Grace, illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa, was published in 1981, and a version in Māori, *Te Kuia me te Pungawerewere* (translated by Hirini Melbourne) was published in 1982. In 1984, multilingual New Zealand children's publishing took a further step forward with the publication of Grace's *Watercress Tuna and the Children of Champion Street*, which was published in three versions, one in Samoan (translated by Albert Wendt), one in Māori (translated by Hirini Melbourne), and one in English.⁸³ This picture book features Māori, Pākehā, and

⁸⁰ Mahy's books were published in New York by Franklin Watts and in London by Dent. Cowley's *The Duck and the Gun* was published by Doubleday, New York. A 1985 version, published by Scholastic (interestingly, as an instructional reading book) with illustrations by New Zealander Robyn Belton, won the 1985 Russell Clark Award for illustration.

⁸¹ Coincidentally, the first novel by a Māori writer (*Pounamu Pounamu*, by Witi Ihimaera) was also published in 1972.

⁸² *Crayfishing with Grandmother* was illustrated by Barbara Strathdee.

⁸³ This book, too, was illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa.

Pasifika children dancing as a result of a visit of a magical tuna (eel) distributing gifts, each gift being representative of the child's culture.

These publishing successes on both the national and international stages showed that there were local writers and illustrators who could produce engaging stories for young readers, and also revealed a growing awareness of the diversity of the reading audience within New Zealand.

The revision process

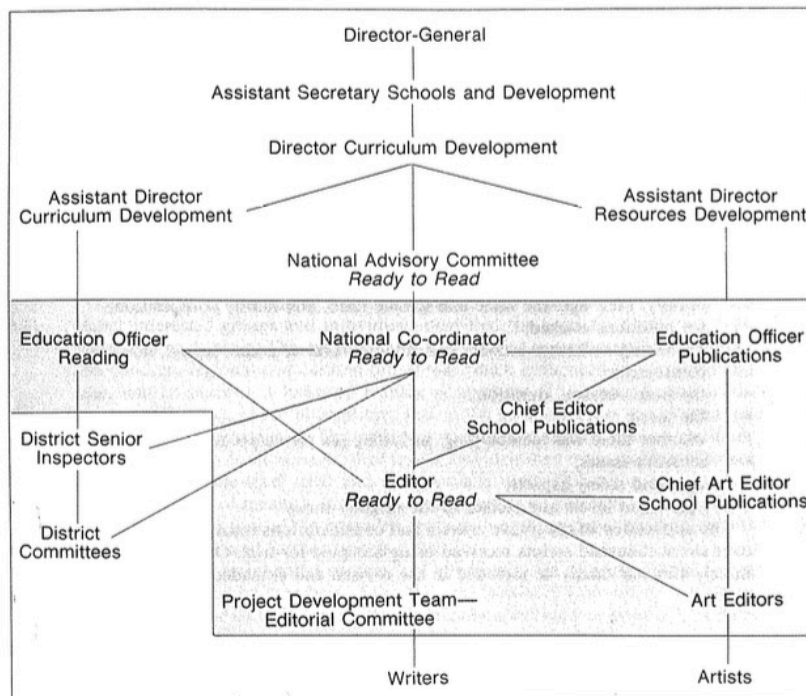
Details of the revision process may be reconstructed using information from a variety of sources. Published sources include Leckie's UNESCO report, *Reading in Junior Classes*, and occasional articles in *Education* and *National Education*.

Unpublished (and non-archived) sources include minutes of meetings, communications documents, working documents (including draft scripts, mock ups, trial books, and evaluation forms), and information from conversations with two of the series developers, Lois Thompson and Hone Apanui.

The revision of the Ready to Read series was extensive, involving a very large development team headed by a National Advisory Committee, extensive trialling within schools, and consultation with community organisations.⁸⁴ Figure 6.1 shows the extent of the communications network within the Department. The National Advisory Committee (NAC) included staff from the head office of the Department of Education, along with Advisers to Junior Classes, Reading Advisers, teachers, and representatives from universities and teachers' colleges (including Marie Clay), NZEI, the Publishers' Association, and (to ensure equitable portrayal of gender roles in the materials) representatives from the Committee on Women in Education. A National Coordinator role was held at different times by Pam Coote and Joyce Burnett.

⁸⁴ These included the New Zealand Parent Teachers' Association, the Māori Women's Welfare League, and Māori elders.

*Ready to Read Revision and Extension Project
Administrative Structure and Communications Network*



The diagram above sets out the general structure of the *Ready to Read* revision and extension project, and shows the extensive communication links involved.

Figure 6.1. The consultation hierarchy (Leckie 43).

The NAC set the direction for the revision project and was supported by a district committee in each education board area, and by a Wellington-based Editorial Committee largely made up of staff from the School Publications Branch.⁸⁵ In the first few years of the RRRE June Melser had covered the role of Ready to Read editor on a part-time basis.⁸⁶ In 1979, it was clear that a full time editor was needed and Margaret Mooney, an Auckland junior school adviser and strong advocate of children's literature, was appointed. The Editorial Committee carried out the script development work, including the administration of trialling. In addition to the series editor, other key members were: Lois Thompson, Chief Editor School Publications; Doug Helm, Curriculum Development Officer: Reading; Michael Keith, Education Officer; Terence Taylor, Chief Art Editor; Clare

⁸⁵ In this chapter, I am following the practice of the Ready to Read series developers in capitalising the names of committees and key documents.

⁸⁶ Melser also became a prolific writer herself of instructional reading materials for commercial publishers, often working closely with Joy Cowley.

Bowes, Judy Shanahan, Lynette Vondruska, Art Editors; and Hone Apanui, Editor: Māori Publications.⁸⁷

The NAC based the development of the revised series on a set of beliefs that incorporated the ideas about reading instruction described by Simpson in *Suggestions for Teaching Reading in Infant Classes* along with “knowledge gained from the experience of practicing teachers over the past twenty years” (*Reading in Junior Classes* 7). These beliefs as published in the new handbook were:

Reading programmes should be child centred.

Reading for meaning is paramount.

Reading must always be rewarding.

Children learn to read by reading.

Children learn best on books that have meaning and are rewarding.

The best approach to teaching reading is a combination of approaches.

The best cure for reading failure is good first teaching.

The foundations of literacy are laid in the early years. (9)

These beliefs remain central to New Zealand reading instruction and Ready to Read publishing.⁸⁸ The “combination of approaches” referred to includes writing and, in regard to reading: teachers reading to students, shared reading (an approach not included in the 1962 handbook), guided reading (where the teacher supports a small group of students in reading a text themselves), and

⁸⁷ Lois Thompson credits Doug Helm (Curriculum Development Officer: Reading) with leading the thinking in the area of early reading (personal communication).

⁸⁸ The approach to reading and writing instruction in New Zealand in the early years of school is described in the Ministry of Education handbook *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4* (2003) and exemplified in the Ministry’s online teacher support material, “Instructional series: Ready to Read,” found at <http://instructionalseries.tki.org.nz/Instructional-Series/Ready-to-Read>.

independent reading (where students reread familiar books or stories, including stories they have written). These approaches to reading instruction are commonly referred to by the catchphrase “reading to, with, and by,” and the mix is closely associated with the core principles of whole language as described here by Smith and Elley:

This approach to the teaching of reading [...] is referred to in many countries as a ‘whole language’ or ‘natural language’ approach. It is ‘whole’, both in the sense that it integrates all the language modes – speaking, listening, reading and writing, and that it takes the children from ‘whole’ (not fragmented) segments of meaningful text, to words, and then letters, rather than the reverse. (140-41)

They note that

With such a rich immersion in written language, five-year-olds gradually acquire the fundamental skills of meaning-construction from text as a result of regular practice with interesting repetitive stories and rhymes, by writing about their personal and collective experiences, and by being stretched into a wider range of more and more difficult texts under the guidance of sympathetic adults. (140)

Developing the scripts

The script development process was long and exacting, involving extensive trialling, editing, and consultation. Rather than the texts being written by a small team of writers as in the case of the 1963 materials (using a tightly controlled repertoire of vocabulary and sentence structures), the texts for the revised series were selected from freelance submissions, resulting in a wide range of text forms, vocabulary, and writing styles. In response to invitations in *National Education*, *Education*, and other magazines, writers submitted over seven thousand scripts for consideration. One hundred and fifty scripts made it to the first round of school-based trialling and one hundred and twenty were accepted for final publication. In addition, workshops were held with established writers and illustrators to develop scripts. It was during one of these workshops that Joy

Cowley and illustrator Robyn Belton began their collaboration on *Greedy Cat*, now an icon of the Ready to Read series.

To ensure the appeal of the materials for readers, the NAC developed a set of criteria for script selection and development. Although not published during the initial revision period, Mooney later included the list in her 1988 book, *Developing Lifelong Readers*.⁸⁹ A key question, and one that was included in trialling, was “Does the story have charm, magic, impact, and appeal?” While such qualities are essentially indefinable and unquantifiable, something that *could* be observed and taken into account was the response of children to the texts. Accordingly, school-based trialling became a central part of the development process. A 1980 NAC document entitled “Procedure for “Scripts for trial”: Ready to Read” sets out twenty-two steps involved in processing scripts (there are handwritten notes on the hard copy that suggest there were in fact more).

In what follows, I summarise the script development process. All scripts received as a result of the call for submissions were sent to the Ready to Read editor, Margaret Mooney, for initial sifting. Mooney then distributed copies of the selected scripts and a comments sheet to all “interested parties” in the School Publications Branch to add their thoughts, before taking the scripts to the Editorial Committee for consideration as to whether the script should be rejected or proceed further for editing.

For those assessed as potential scripts, the editor would make changes, discuss them with the author, and present the edited copy to the Editorial Committee for further evaluation. The Senior Art Editor assigned accepted scripts to Art Editors for typesetting and commissioning of illustrators. Mockups were pasted together, using the rough illustrations, and then underwent a further round of review and comments and consideration by the Editorial Committee. Mockups accepted for trial were printed as black and white booklets and sent to schools.

⁸⁹ Working documents show slight variations in the wording of the criteria over the period of the revision but the list published by Mooney remains an accurate representation. See Appendix Three for a full copy of the criteria.

Teachers were asked to use the trial books with students and then fill in evaluation sheets.⁹⁰ Although modified slightly over the course of trialling, in general the evaluation sheets asked for a description of the group of children, an indication of their interest in the text, comments about the ability of the children to read and understand the text, feedback on aspects such as story length, the size of the print, the illustrations, and recommendations for reading levels. As a further check of text difficulty, teachers were asked to take Running Records.⁹¹ Each trial was for a maximum of eight weeks, after which District Committees would organise a meeting with teachers to discuss the trial feedback, and agree on recommendations. The District Committees were supplied with the following questions (or criteria) to guide the discussion:

- 1 Does the piece have charm/magic/impact/appeal?
- 2 Is the idea within the piece worthwhile? Does this idea (theme) allow a reader to develop a better understanding of him/herself, or his/her family, or human or natural behaviour or his own world? ⁹²
- 3 What is the shape of the story? Could interest be quickened if the story had another – more dramatic – order of events?
- 4 What comments have you – in general – on the use of language?

The appeal of the texts for students was paramount. The guidelines for trialling stated that “teachers will form their own opinions of each text, and then modify these in the light of children’s reactions,” and the instructions for the District

⁹⁰ I have used a 1980 NAC document, “Guidelines for district committees: Ready to Read” as a source of further detail about the trialling process.

⁹¹ Running Records are a method developed by Marie Clay of assessing children’s oral reading accuracy and recording their reading behaviours. As children read a text aloud, teachers use a system of notations to indicate such reading behaviours as errors, self-corrections, rerunning the text, omitting words, or asking the teacher for help.

⁹² It is interesting to note that Mooney did not include this question in her list of the script selection criteria. I explore the implications of this question in subsequent chapters.

Committees stated that criteria 1 and 2 “are considered to be most important, and if a text is found to be unacceptable according to these, the committee should not recommend its publication.”

The 1980s trials of the Ready to Read books were far more detailed and extensive than the trials of the 1963 materials, which although an innovation at the time, had involved only thirty-three schools. Burnett’s communications show the earnest intention of the Ready to Read series developers for wide consultation, and it appears that most areas of New Zealand were involved in trialling. Minutes of the NAC and Editorial meetings include reports from District Committees in Auckland, South Auckland, Taranaki, Wanganui, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury, Otago, Southland, and Gisborne, and there are also mentions of visits by members of the EC to meetings and seminars around the country. Feedback was also sought (and received) from national organisations such as the New Zealand Parent Teachers Association, and the Māori Women’s Welfare League. I refer to some of this feedback in Chapters Ten and Eleven.

The recommendations from the District Committees along with all the evaluation sheets, Running Records, and trial books were sent to the Coordinator, who in turn passed them on to the Editor and then to the EC to decide (again) on further actions. Scripts that were recommended for further revision were involved in “mini-trials.” The final EC recommendations were passed on to the NAC, which then made a recommendation to the Director of Curriculum Development, who made the final decision to publish or not. A further consideration was equitable coverage (across the series) of gender, ethnicity, family structures, and home circumstances. Lois Thompson refers to the extensive use of checklists to ensure this.⁹³

A 1981 *National Education* article (“Revising Ready to Read”) questioned the lengthy development process, pointing out “it is now six years since a revision of this basic reading series was first discussed.” The article reported on an interview with Margaret Mahy, stating:

⁹³ Personal communication.

she [Mahy] welcomes the input from reading specialists, but does feel that the editorial team is working under very difficult conditions and that 'it is hard to arrange a literary experience by committee.' She has found that she has trouble maintaining her own interest and enthusiasm about a story – 'it tends to become fossilised' – in the face of the long delay between sending in material and getting any decisive response, editorial or financial." (199)

Cowley, too, in her 2010 memoir (*Navigation*) mentions her horror at discovering the publication process was expected to take five years (131). By 1982, however, the first of the new books began to arrive in schools.

The new materials

Rather than being delivered to schools as a complete set, the new materials were published as they were ready, beginning with three books in 1982, and twenty-three books the following year. Altogether, by 1988, fifty-three student books were published (a huge increase on the eighteen books of the 1963 series) along with fifteen large (A2 sized) nursery rhyme cards. The books included miscellanies, a collection of poems, and some books with two stories, bringing the total number of published items to 136.⁹⁴ From then on, new materials were considered to be part of a rolling revision of the series, with new items added and older ones deleted so that it would remain up to date without the need for a separate, whole-scale (and expensive) revision process.

Although a small number of stories from the 1963 series were retained, in general the new materials were remarkably different in format and content to the earlier stories. Where the 1963 materials had consisted almost entirely of realistic stories, the revised series also included many fantasies, stories with first-person narrators, poetry, plays, descriptions, and non-fiction articles (including some wordless non-fiction texts). Instead of consisting only of graded

⁹⁴ Information about publishing over this period is sometimes contradictory. I have arrived at these figures by tracking down actual copies of the books and crosschecking with information published by the series developers, including information in *Reading in Junior Classes*. See Appendix Two for a complete list.

texts designed for small-group reading instruction, the 1980s series included materials designed to support *all* the reading approaches described above (reading to students, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading). In direct response to requests from teachers (and recommended in the 1975 evaluation report), an introductory reading level, magenta, was developed to precede the red level, and a set of seven non-graded story books were published for reading to students.⁹⁵ All but one of these seven were fantasies by Margaret Mahy.⁹⁶ The materials also included enlarged copies of two books (*I'm the King of the Mountain* and *Number One*) and two bilingual books (*Taniwha, Taniwha*, modeled on the traditional game *What's the time Mr Wolf?* and *Where is the taniwha?/ Kei hea te taniwha?*) The bilingual books were published in a concertina format with an English language version on one side, and a Māori language version on the other, shown in Figure 10.2. There were audiotope versions of some stories, and, as with the 1963 series, support materials for teachers. These included a handbook, *Reading in Junior Classes*, and "Teacher editions" of some books, which had an extra page of teaching suggestions. A quirky addition to the series was a set of four large wooden jigsaw puzzles, each featuring an illustration from one of the new books. The puzzles experiment was not repeated but is an interesting demonstration of the sense of enthusiasm and innovation surrounding the new series. In 1984, a *Junior Journal*, a collection of pieces in a miscellany format, was introduced to supplement the materials at the upper end of the Ready to Read series, and to provide a "bridge" to the *School Journal*.

The variety within the new series meant that the familiarity and predictability of almost every aspect of the materials (genre, content, vocabulary, layout) was reduced compared with the 1963 materials. Some of the more unusual texts

⁹⁵ The books were designated as being for "Sharing at all Stages" (*Reading in Junior Classes* 99) but were not produced in enlarged book formats, meaning that in order to use them for shared reading, which involves students being able to follow the text, students would have had their own copies. In practice, it was more likely that teachers would have read the stories to students.

⁹⁶ I discuss these books in Chapter Nine.

include Mahy's *Fantail*, *Fantail* (a conversation between a fantail and an unidentified person) intended for students reading at the first level of the series, and a "stream of consciousness" poem, "Dog Talk" by Sue McCauley, told from the perspective of a dog. Yet while the variety within the new materials may have placed greater demands on readers, at the same time, the introduction of the shared reading approach provided greater support.

There was no longer a uniform "series look." Instead, the new books were published in a variety of sizes, in landscape or portrait orientation, and with individual, distinctive cover designs. Reading levels were subtly conveyed by a "colour wheel" on the back of each book rather than by the colour of the book cover itself. Authors and illustrators were named, and books had title pages and page numbers. The layout within the books was also varied, often having both text and illustration on the same page rather than on facing pages, as in the original series.

The variety in the format of the materials was deliberate. While Simpson had encouraged picture book reading *alongside* the use of the graded Ready to Read books, the NAC criteria, and the inclusion of books for shared reading clearly indicate a more focused attempt to blur the boundaries between instructional reading and personal reading. Leckie states:

An important feature of the revised and expanded *Ready to Read* series has been the production of books which, in appearance, appeal, and quality of story, can take their place alongside the best of children's picture-story books, yet be part of a structured reading series which provides children with a manageable progression of difficulties and challenges. Variety in format and presentation emphasises that each book exists in its own right as a picture-story book [...]. The aim has been to produce books which look like and are "real" books containing stories which are "real" stories. (45-46)

Reading in Junior Classes includes the statement that the books "should follow acknowledged principles of book design" and that the series "should not begin at

any stage to look like a set of ‘readers’” (85). The contrast in the appearance of the 1963 and 1980s graded books is demonstrated in Figures 6.2 and 6.3.

The revised series was received with great enthusiasm. A 1988 New Zealand Herald piece (“NZ Series Acclaimed”) described the series as representing “a reading philosophy that is the envy of teachers in Australia, Canada, the United States and Britain” (9). It appears that overseas sales helped defray the ongoing costs of publishing the materials within New Zealand.⁹⁷

Several of the books published in the 1980s remain in the Ready to Read series to this day. In subsequent chapters I explore the “charm, magic, impact, and appeal” of the revised series, in particular the contributions of Joy Cowley and Margaret Mahy.



Figure 6.2. Covers of all the books in the 1963 series

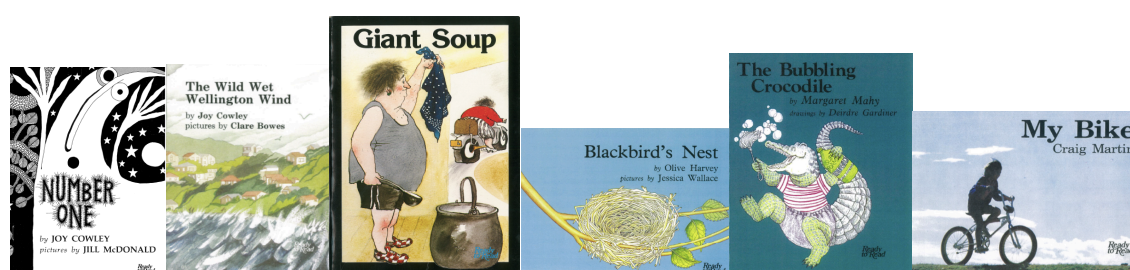


Figure 6.3. A small sample of 1980s book covers.

⁹⁷ Sales to Australia and the United States are referred to in an article “Reading Scheme Wins World Praise”) in *The Dominion Sunday Times*, June 14, 1987, and a *Department of Education Newsletter*, January/February, 1988. The newsletter also states that “the department is currently tying up contracts with Canada and Britain, and other countries like China have also shown an interest in purchasing the series” (n.p.).

Chapter Seven

Developing lifelong readers ⁹⁸

Books that are worth reading and that enhance the children's view of themselves as readers will convince them that reading is worthwhile and satisfying, and that it is for them.

Developing Lifelong Readers.

Reading is far more than the retrieval of information from a collection of printed records. It is the active encounter of one mind and one imagination with another.

How texts teach what readers learn.

In Chapter Six, I briefly described the results of the 1980s revision of the Ready to Read series, in particular the increase in the variety of the materials. I argue here (and in subsequent chapters) that the 1980s materials imply a more sophisticated view of what it means to be a reader, and a deeper consideration of the role of instructional materials in facilitating this. As cited previously, Meek (*Learning to Read* 1982) states: "what the beginning reader reads makes all the difference to his view of reading" (11). *Reading in Junior Classes* (1985) states the aim of the Ready to Read Revision and Extension project (RRRE) to publish books that could "take their place alongside the best of children's picture books" (83). As well as having implications for the literary qualities of the Ready to Read texts, this aim reflects the importance placed on children becoming "lifelong readers." While maintaining a focus on meaningful stories and natural language, the script criteria developed by the National Advisory Committee strongly reflect the statement from *Reading in Junior Classes* that capturing the imagination "provides the most effective motivation for reading" (85). The importance placed on opportunities for "creative participation" (Iser *The Implied Reader* 1974 275) and "imaginative cooperation" (Tucker 1991 49) is evident in the examples from the script criteria reproduced here:

⁹⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Six, *Developing Lifelong Readers* is the title of Mooney's book where she discusses the principles underpinning New Zealand's approach to reading instruction.

Does the story have charm, magic, impact, and appeal?

Is the idea worthwhile?

Does the language spark the child's imagination, and inspire thought?

Are there memorable phrases and/or sentences?

Do the illustrations reflect the mood of the story and give rise to feelings and emotions?

What gaps is the reader required to fill?

How much does the author leave to the reader's imagination?

Does the story say something new, or, if a familiar theme, does it offer a new view? (Mooney 4-5)⁹⁹

Where the 1963 series developers had done their best to create materials that were clear and relatively unambiguous, the 1980s developers embraced the concept of ambiguity and gaps, encouraging readers to think beyond the literal meaning of texts. A statement in *Reading in Junior Classes* refers to the series as having "taken into account the interplay of fantasy and reality with which children experience the world" (83-84). The inclusion of fantasy (other than the fantasy elements within traditional tales) is a significant change in the 1980s materials, opening up possibilities for plots, characters, settings, and ideas not available within the realistic contexts of the 1963 series. Another major change, clearly signaled in the script criteria, is attention to the aesthetic qualities of the language. I have discussed in previous chapters instances of unintended aesthetic impact within the 1963 materials – for example, as an outcome of repetition used as a support for the reader. In the 1980s materials, there are many more instances of language that seem deliberately crafted for aesthetic effect, as in the revised version of "The Lion and the Mouse," which I discuss in this chapter, and in the works of Cowley and Mahy, which I discuss in Chapters Eight and Nine.

⁹⁹ See Appendix Three for the full list of criteria.

Only six of the 1963 stories were retained in the 1980s series. Three of them – “Jenny Comes to School” and two traditional tales (“The Magpie’s Tail” and “The Sweet Porridge”) remained almost unchanged, but *Saturday Morning*, “Timothy Gets Ready,” and “The Lion and the Mouse” were extensively revised. A comparison of these “before and after” versions provides an opportunity to investigate their literary qualities, and the changes in the opportunities for readers to engage with the stories. The following observations about reader interactions assume the context of a teacher-led guided reading lesson, within which the children read and discuss the stories.

***Saturday Morning* (1963 and 1983)**

Saturday Morning was the only one of the twelve “little books” to be retained. In the 1963 version Father calls Richard and Mark to breakfast and then announces that he is going to hose the car. Mark and his big sister, Helen, ask Father to hose them, too. On the following page, Boxer the dog also “asks” to be hosed (see Figure 7.1).¹⁰⁰ After the hosing, Father asks who will help him clean the car and Helen and Mark agree to do so.

Father hosed Helen and Mark.
 “Please will you hose me?”
 barked Boxer.
 Father hosed Boxer too.



Figure 7.1. “Father hosed Helen and Mark.”

When the car is clean, the children tell Mother, who makes a picnic lunch for the family to enjoy on the back lawn. At this point, Richard, the youngest child, re-enters the story and sprays the rest of the family with the hose, much to the annoyance of his parents (see Figure 7.2).

¹⁰⁰ As mentioned earlier, there are no page numbers in the 1963 little books.



Figure 7.2. "Father is wet."

In the 1963 story, the parents control the action: it is Father who decides to clean the car and asks the children to help, Mother who makes the lunch, Father who tells Richard to leave the hose alone, and Mother who admonishes him when he hoses the family. Even though Richard provides the dramatic climax, he is absent from most of the story, and told he is naughty when he attempts to assert himself. (Mary Roberts was perhaps trying to redress the balance by giving the children more presence in the story through her humorous illustrations. Figure 7.1 shows Helen and Mark's delighted response to the initial hosing, and in Figure 7.2, they seem quite intrigued and impressed by Richard's antics with the hose.)¹⁰¹

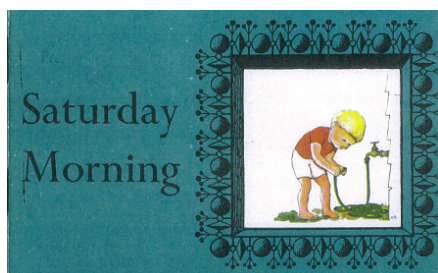
In the 1983 version, the illustrations along with the book design bring Richard to the forefront of events, creating a more coherent and, ultimately, a more intriguing story, taking it from being merely a humorous anecdote to enabling a deeper exploration of feelings and relationships (and fairness).

The contrast is evident from the first glance. Figure 7.3 shows the covers of the two versions. Although Richard features on both, it is not until well into the 1963 book that the reader may make any connection between the cover illustration and the developing storyline. The 1983 book is much larger than the original and the illustration of Richard dominates the cover, suggesting that he is to have an important role. He sits on a bucket with a cleaning cloth nearby, facing the viewer and looking pleased with himself, inviting the reader to speculate

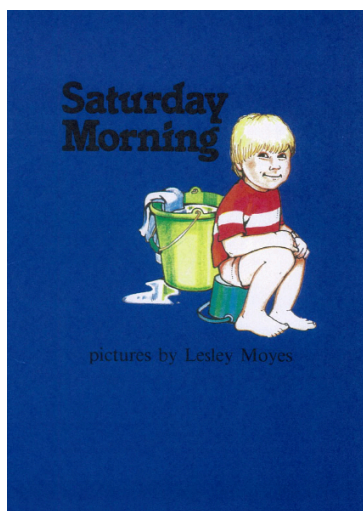
¹⁰¹ I have discussed in Chapter Four how Roberts also creates a humorous subtext in her illustrations for *Christmas Shopping*.

about what he has done or is about to do. The title page, a feature not included in the 1963 books, is dramatically different from the cover illustration. “The boy” (not yet named) is looking upset, quite possibly disrupting predictions readers may have made from the cover illustration. As stated above, in the 1963 version, there are no further clues until almost the end of the story as to what Richard might do with the hose and therefore less likelihood, at least, until subsequent readings, of the reader noticing him and speculating as to what his role might be. Already we can see that the later version has the potential for a far more interactive reading experience, with much for the reader to be thinking and wondering about. The cover illustration also introduces an element of suspense, and the question of the fulfilment or disruption of the reader’s predictions.

1963 cover



1983 cover



1983 title page

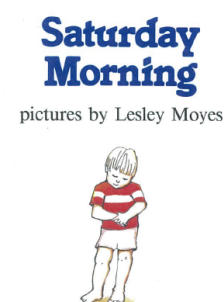


Figure 7.3. *Saturday Morning*, 1963 and 1983.

The written texts in both versions begin in a similar fashion with a parent (Mother in 1963, Dad in 1983) calling Mark and Richard to get up and come to breakfast.¹⁰² In the 1963 book, the page turn shows a jump in time with Dad expressing his intention to wash the car. Mark and his big sister, Helen are

¹⁰² As is typical of the 1980s materials, the language is less formal than in the 1963 materials (the parents are referred to as “Mum” and “Dad” rather than “Mother” and “Father” and contractions are included within dialogue).

clearly identified (but as mentioned, Richard does not appear again until the end of the story). In the 1983 version, the first two illustrations are shown on facing pages, with page two showing Dad calling the boys to breakfast and page three showing the family (one of the boys and two new characters, as yet unnamed). There is no mention of Richard or Dad, or indeed of breakfast, in the text on this page. Instead, readers are left to infer that this is breakfast, and, from the dialogue that the children shown here are Helen and Mark. Richard is not shown in the illustration, but an upturned cup and half-eaten egg (a clue that was reported to be a source of delight to students when this book was trialled) remind the reader that he is still “present” in the story.

When Mum mentions that she is going to clean the car, Helen and Mark volunteer to help.¹⁰³ A double-page illustration (4-5) shows Mum, Helen, and Mark cleaning the car together and singing, “This is the way we clean the car [...]”. The words of the song suggest that it is adapted from “Here we go round the mulberry bush,” likely to have been familiar to students. The addition of the song here helps convey a happy, busy atmosphere, adds aesthetic impact, and also, possibly, a confidence boost for readers with its highly repetitive and predictable text pattern. In contrast to this joyful family scene, however, Richard is shown on the far right of the illustration, looking upset, presumably at his exclusion from the car cleaning and the song (Figure 7.4). This is a repetition of the image of Richard on the title page but now the reader can see why he is upset. Some readers may also notice that Richard is standing close to the hose, but if not, this is a clue to be noticed and enjoyed on a subsequent reading.

¹⁰³ The roles of the parents are swapped in the 1983 version: Mum washes the car and Dad prepares lunch. I discuss the changes in gender roles in the 1980s materials in more detail in Chapter Ten.

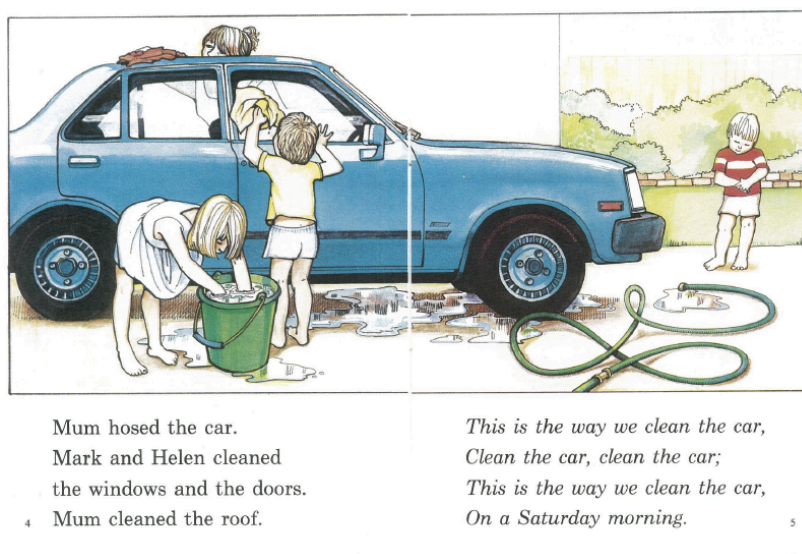


Figure 7.4. *Saturday Morning* (1983 4-5).

On the following two pages, Mum hugs Helen and Mark and sprays them with the hose, further accentuating Richard's exclusion. Page eight shows the dog being hosed, lightening the tone.

There are some interesting contrasts between the two versions in relation to the hosing of the dog. As discussed in Chapter Four, the dog in the 1963 version is called Boxer and the text reads: "Please will you hose me?" barked Boxer," suggesting that Boxer may, in fact, be talking. In the 1983 version, the dog's name has been changed, and the text reads: "Hose me, too! Hose me, too!" barked Scamp" (8). The snappy short phrases of the later version replicate the rhythm of a dog barking, suggesting that these "words" are an interpretation of Scamp's wishes by the narrator. This avoids the somewhat puzzling ambiguity of the 1963 version. The change of the dog's name to Scamp, with its connotations of mischief and indulgent humour is, perhaps, also a thematic connection to Richard's actions on the facing page (shown in Figure 7.5) where he is reaching up to take a sausage from the table. This helps to position Richard as being more mischievous and entertaining than naughty. It also raises the possibility that Richard is planning further mischief, or perhaps that he just wants to be noticed. Some students may notice a lighthearted intertextual link to another 1983 Ready to Read book, *Greedy Cat*, featuring a cat who has a penchant for stealing

sausages (also shown in Figure 7.5).¹⁰⁴ This “in joke” and the overall style and content of the illustrations serve to keep the tone of the story light, despite Richard’s obvious feelings of exclusion. Readers are building their awareness that “elements in the text and pictures are not there casually, and that hints and clues are there for the later configuration of the story just waiting for the reader to recognize them as such” (Bellorin and Silva-Díaz 118).



“Mum, Helen, Mark, Richard!
Come and have lunch,” said Dad.
“We will have lunch in the garden.”

Mum went shopping
and got some sausages.
Along came Greedy Cat.
He looked in the shopping bag.
Gobble, gobble, gobble,
and that was the end of that.



Saturday Morning (1983 9).

Greedy Cat (1982 3).

Figure 7.5. Richard and Greedy Cat both stealing sausages.

As in the 1963 story, the story ends with Richard hosing his family but here the illustrations focus on the humour of the situation rather than on the parents’ irritation. Dad’s reaction here is dramatic and exaggerated, almost slapstick, and everyone is laughing. Rather than being reprimanded (as in the 1963 version), Richard has regained the attention of his family and provided them with an experience to remember.

We see in the changes to text, design, and illustrations in the 1983 version of *Saturday Morning*, a more coherent narrative, clearer characterisation, and a greater focus on the feelings of the protagonist (making connections to readers’ own experiences, for example, of Saturday mornings, helping with household chores, playing with hoses, feeling left out, or playing tricks). We see other opportunities for the creative participation (and delight) of the reader, too, such as the addition of the song. There is also the inclusion in the illustrations of the

¹⁰⁴ I discuss *Greedy Cat* and other stories by Joy Cowley in Chapter Eight.

familiar branding on the cereal packet on page three, a tomato-shaped sauce container (not unique to New Zealand, but a very common sight at New Zealand barbecues) on page twelve, and a white cat that appears in all the illustrations from page six (another aspect particularly enjoyed by readers when this text was trialled).

One of the series developers' goals not addressed in this story was the representation of "the experience of young children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, home circumstances, and locations" (*Reading in Junior Classes* 85). The family in *Saturday Morning* are Pākehā, as were most of the families in the 1963 series. This goal appears to have been a key driver for the changes to "Timothy Gets Ready," as described in the following section.

"Timothy Gets Ready" (1963) and "The Flood" (1984)

"The Flood," illustrated by Rosemary Turner, appears in the 1984 miscellany *The Big Bed*, and is a revision of Eve Kitchener's story "Timothy Gets Ready," illustrated by Dora Ridall, from the 1963 miscellany *The Hungry Lambs*. As described in Chapter Four, in the 1963 version, when Timothy tries to help by getting himself ready to go with Father and his older sister, Susan, to the hospital to collect his new baby brother, he inadvertently causes a flood in the bathroom by leaving a tap on. When the flood is discovered, Timothy disappears, only coming back into the house at teatime. Susan tells him he is naughty, but Mother says that he was just trying to help. The way the story is told (providing clues in the illustrations but not explicitly describing events and feelings), the drama of the flood and the contrasting responses of the characters create "gaps" for interpretation and make it one of the more intriguing stories of the 1963 series. Like the 1983 version of *Saturday Morning*, this story works on two levels, describing a domestic drama while also exploring how and why the characters behave as they do.

"The Flood" replaces the original characters with a Māori family: Mere replaces Timothy as the main character, and Hone replaces Susan as the older sibling. This story is one of several within *The Big Bed* that, together, portray a

variety of families and lifestyles.¹⁰⁵ As in the revised version of *Saturday Morning*, the most notable changes in “The Flood” are to the design and illustrations. The brightly coloured, impressionistic illustrations flow exuberantly around the text, demanding to be noticed, providing clues and suggestions about the characters and their lifestyle. The design of this story is a dramatic contrast to the somewhat sedate and repetitive layout of “Timothy Gets Ready”, with its muted colour palette, clearly delineated illustrations, wide margins, and large areas of white space (see Figures 7.6 and 7.7).

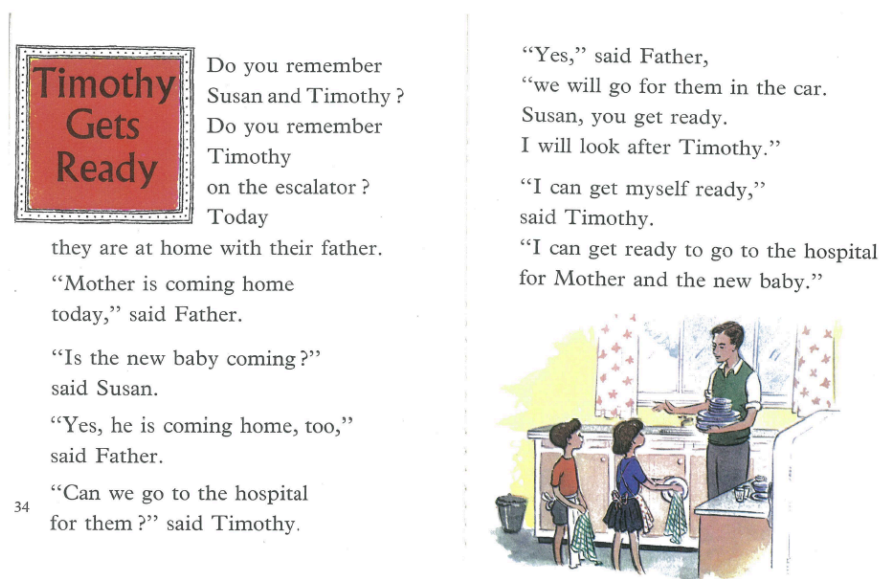


Figure 7.6. The opening spread of “Timothy Gets Ready” (34-35).

¹⁰⁵ Editorial Committee working papers suggest that the decision to have a girl as the protagonist is likely to be no more significant than the fact that of the other three stories in *The Big Bed* featuring single protagonists, one is a girl (Jenny in “Jenny Comes to School,” retained from the 1963 series) and two are boys. The other stories in *The Big Bed* are: “Michael is a Clown” about a preschooler who gets into his mother’s makeup; “Pigeons” about a Pasifika boy who feeds his lunch to the hungry pigeons and then realises he has no lunch left for himself, and “The Big Bed” about four children, a dog, and a cat, who congregate on their parents’ bed when the parents are trying to sleep in.

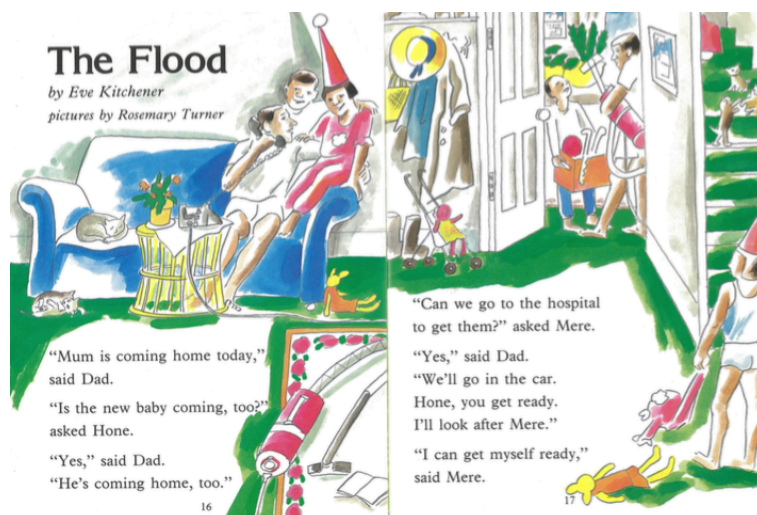


Figure 7.7. The opening spread of "The Flood" (16-17).

The contrast between the two versions of the story is evident even from their opening pages. The opening lines of the 1963 version refer to Timothy's earlier appearances in three stories at the Yellow level: "Do you remember Susan and Timothy? Do you remember Timothy on the escalator? Today they are at home with Father" (34). The 1984 story has none of the controlled and "teacherly" scene setting of the earlier version. Instead, by its very title, "The Flood" immediately provides something dramatic and interesting for the reader to wonder about, particularly as the illustrations on the opening pages (16-17) have no apparent connection to a flood. The story begins with Dad telling the children "Mum is coming home today." The ensuing conversation (in both versions) is engaging in the way it gradually reveals to the reader, without explicitly saying so, that Mum is in hospital having had a baby.

The details in the illustrations in "The Flood" convey a sense of a far more relaxed family life than that shown in the 1963 story. In the opening illustration, the vacuum cleaner lies abandoned on the floor and the children are clustered close to Dad while he talks on the phone (the reader may infer that this is the call from the hospital to say that Mum is ready to come home). Mere is sitting on the sofa arm, and both Dad and Hone have an arm around her. There are toys and a book on the floor, along with two cats tumbling and a third cat sitting on the sofa. Other illustrations have almost whimsical elements, such as Mere wearing what appears to be a clown costume in the earlier illustrations, and, later, clutching her toy rabbit.

In addition to conveying the impression of a “lived-in” home, the illustrations emphasise the difference in age and confidence between Hone and Mere, increasing the emotional impact of Mere’s realisation on page twenty-one that she has caused the flood. Page seventeen, for example, shows Dad asking (and expecting) Hone to get himself ready while he (Dad) states his intention to look after Mere. Although Mere is in the foreground of the illustration, she is separated from Dad and Hone. Like Jenny at the beginning of “Jenny Comes to School,” Mere has her back to the reader and is positioned as being an observer, excluded from the action. Like Jenny in her petticoat, the fact that Mere is in her underwear (and a clown hat) emphasises her vulnerability. In contrast to Hone, who is carrying a box of objects and helping Dad clear up, Mere is surrounded by toys (a doll in a pushchair and her rabbit). In the equivalent pages of “Timothy Gets Ready,” none of these differences between the siblings are evident in the illustrations. In fact, Timothy and Susan look to be of a similar size, and both are helping Father dry the dishes.

The visual distinction between Mere and Hone continues throughout the story. On page eighteen when Mere shows Dad that she has dressed herself, her stance (again, with her back to the reader) is ambiguous. She might be posing to show off her outfit, or she might be feeling diffident. We see that she is holding on to her white handbag with two hands, and that she has her toy rabbit tucked under her arm. In fact, in all but one of the illustrations of Mere from this point, she is holding the rabbit, perhaps as a form of reassurance. An interesting detail on page eighteen, adding to the ambiguity of Mere’s situation, is the depiction of Hone pulling a face at Mere at the same time as Dad is praising her for getting herself ready. There is much here for the reader to think about.

At the hospital, Hone is shown leaning nonchalantly on the railings while Mere tugs on Dad’s hand. On page twenty-one when the family arrives home, Mere is again distanced from them. The illustration shows her downcast with the rabbit under her arm, and she is turned towards the reader while the rest of the family is looking at the water coming down the stairs. This positioning of the characters means that no one (except, of course, the reader) notices Mere and her distress at this point. The impact of this illustration is increased by its

placement next to the previous very happy illustration of the two children greeting their mother and the new baby at the hospital.

Mere's sense of exclusion is intensified on page twenty-two when she is shown peeping around the bathroom door while, yet again, Dad and Hone are working together. This is a situation similar to that of Richard in the 1983 version of *Saturday Morning* when he is excluded from cleaning the car. Mere is absent from the page twenty-three illustration, which shows the rest of the family together (Mum and Hone standing close together looking at the new baby, and Dad cooking the tea). The illustration here shows Hone with a protective hand on the bassinette, suggesting his understanding of his responsible role as big brother. These illustrations increase the emotional impact of the final two pages when Mere wants to rejoin her family. Her obvious hesitance on page twenty-four, standing close to the door with her feet turned in, her finger in her mouth (and clutching her rabbit), is likely to evoke an emotional response in the reader, as is the dramatic contrast in the illustration on the facing page where Mere is sitting on Mum's knee, enveloped in a hug. In "Timothy Gets Ready," there is little emotional content. Although the reader may infer that Timothy is upset when he tiptoes out of the house (40), the overall style of the illustrations and the reader's prior knowledge of Timothy as a cheerful, confident character in the three earlier stories affect the level of emotional engagement. Also, once the situation is resolved, there are no obvious signs of affection in "Timothy Gets Ready," nor in fact, in any of the 1963 stories. That is not to suggest that the children in the 1963 stories are to be read as unloved, but that it was perhaps not felt appropriate to show overt emotion within instructional reading materials. In contrast, the illustrations in both "The Flood" and the revised version of *Saturday Morning* do indeed, as in the NAC criteria, "reflect the mood of the story and give rise to feelings and emotions."

The level of reader sophistication required to work through ambiguities such as these is much higher than that required for the 1963 materials. We can see this in relation to the pages shown in Figure 7.7. At a practical level, the close proximity of the illustrations here coupled with the impressionistic style makes the first two pages of "The Flood" (16-17) seem almost as if they are both part of

one bigger illustration. It may require some effort on the part of the young reader to notice that these are the same characters shown at two different times (the clown hat on Mere is an important clue here). There is also a challenge involved in establishing the sequence of events. While the opening conversation seems to flow without a pause from page sixteen to seventeen, the illustrations on page seventeen contain clues (the different positions of the characters, the cats, and the rabbit; Dad no longer talking on the telephone; the vacuum cleaner being put away; Mere no longer wearing her clown suit) that suggest that, in fact, the conversation on that page is happening at a later time.

There are several aspects of the “The Flood” that are representative of overall changes in the 1980s materials. I have already mentioned the portrayal of the family as Māori (an aspect I discuss in more detail in Chapter Ten). Another is its avoidance of gender stereotyping. Dad is happy to involve himself with housework, and when Mum comes home from hospital, he cooks the dinner, whereas in “Timothy Gets Ready,” Mother puts on her apron and does it. A further change in “The Flood” is its recognition of its characters as part of a wider community. This is rare in any of the 1963 stories. In “Timothy Gets Ready,” the hospital visit is fleeting, and the only non-family member who appears in the illustration is a nurse. In contrast, “The Flood” devotes two pages to the hospital visit, in effect slowing the narrative and increasing the focus on this community setting, as shown in Figure 7.8. The two illustrations (19-20) show people of various ethnicities, pregnant women (a sight never seen in the 1963 materials), and a person in a wheelchair, demonstrating social diversity. In a further contrast to “Timothy Gets Ready,” the children are allowed inside the hospital, showing them as being included in this wider community. The signs in the illustrations on these pages are another way of incorporating the “wider world” into the story, as well as providing intriguing details for readers to notice and enjoy, particularly the “KEEP NEW ZEALAND CLEAN” sign and the image of a green kiwi on the rubbish tin (19). In the illustrations of home, too, there are hints of the family’s place within the local community, with glimpses of the house next door shown in a mirror and through a window (23-25). Clearly there is a great deal more for readers to do and to think about in the revised version of this story.



Figure 7.8. The visit to the hospital in “The Flood” (19-20).

“The Lion and the Mouse” (1963 and 1985)

In the family stories discussed above, the greatest changes have been to the design and illustrations, but in “The Lion and the Mouse” we can also see the impact of significant textual changes.¹⁰⁶ In the 1975 national evaluation, teachers were enthusiastic about the traditional tales in the miscellanies, but had asked for the stories to be shorter. The 1963 version of “The Lion and the Mouse” is a clear example of excessive wordiness affecting the appeal of a story. The 1985 version has been pared back to 368 words compared to the 630 words of the earlier version. Not only does this make the 1985 story a better fit for a reading lesson, doubtless an important practical consideration for teachers, but the textual changes create a much more dramatic and engaging tale, and one that is truer to the format of the original fable.

One of the most obvious differences between the two versions is the incorporation of a Peter Rabbit-like aspect into the 1963 version. Perhaps with the intention of downplaying the potential violence of the story, the mouse is portrayed as a childlike character who likes to play tricks. When the mouse is caught at the beginning of the story, the lion tells him “I could kill you with one paw [...] Then you could play no more tricks” (42). Later, as part of their (rather long) conversation, the mouse tells the lion “... my mother said my tricks would

¹⁰⁶ The 1963 version was published in *The Donkey’s Egg*, and the 1985 version was published in *Crinkum-Crankum*.

get me into trouble" (44). When the mouse is released, he runs home to his mother, who asks, "Have you been playing tricks again?" (46). His mother's actions and her lack of knowledge of exactly what he has been up to (as shown in Figure 7.9) are reminiscent (perhaps deliberately so) of Peter Rabbit's arrival home after escaping Mr McGregor: "His mother was busy cooking; she wondered what he had done with his clothes" ... [she] put him to bed, and made some chamomile tea" (Potter 54 56). The small size of the picture of the mouse in bed being tended by his mother adds to the impression of the mouse's childishness and vulnerability (Figure 7.9 is reproduced in a larger scale than it appears in the book in order to show the detail in the illustration).

She did not know
what he had been up to,
but all mothers know
when their children have been
in trouble.
She put him to bed
and gave him his tea.



Figure 7.9. "The Lion and the Mouse" (1963 46).

The dramatic impact of the 1963 version is further diluted by the splitting of the story into two parts, perhaps to allow for each part to be read within one reading lesson. Part One ends with Mother putting the mouse to bed, but by adding this episode, the momentum of the story is lost. There is no letup, however, in the 1985 version. After the lion lets the mouse go, the last line on the page states "The mouse ran home to his mother" (21), and the following page begins "A few days later, the mouse heard a roar" (22). When the mouse arrives to help the lion, he immediately takes control, telling him what to do in order to keep safe: "Shh, Lion!" said the mouse. "You mustn't roar like that. The trapper

will hear you and come to kill you. “Shh! I’ll help you!” (23). This sense of pace and urgency (and agency on the part of the mouse) is missing in the 1963 version, which includes unnecessary explanation. In the earlier version, when the mouse arrives, he says “Hullo, Lion,” and proceeds to explain why he is there: “When you caught me, you let me go. Now you are caught in a net, and I have come to help you” (49). Furthermore, there is no indication of the danger the lion faces if he is not freed from the net.

The structure of the sentences also affects the pace and drama of the story. We can see this contrast in the opening sentences of each version.¹⁰⁷

One hot day a lion was sleeping in his cave, when a little mouse ran over his paw and up on to his nose. The lion was awake at once, and he clapped his paw down upon the little mouse. (1963 40)

One hot day, a lion was sleeping in his cave. Suddenly, a mouse ran over his paw and jumped on his nose. The lion woke up at once. He clapped his paw down on the mouse. (1985 18)

The 1985 version uses shorter sentences for greater impact. The adverb “suddenly” signals a dramatic change in action, and each subsequent full stop creates a pause to consider the impact of each new development. Conversely, in the 1963 version, the use of conjunctions “when” and “and” in the first two sentences has the effect of smoothing the links between events and slowing the pace, reducing the immediacy and danger of the events.

The change in the first page break is also significant. The 1963 version ends with the lion starting a conversation with the mouse (“Little mouse,” he said, “Why did you run over my paw and up on to my nose?”) thus introducing the possibility of negotiation with the lion before the reader has had an opportunity to consider any alternative. In contrast, the first page of the 1985 version emphasises the mouse’s dilemma (and likely death), ending with “but the lion had hold of him.”

¹⁰⁷ I have not reproduced the line breaks of the student versions here.

The repetition of the mouse's cry – "Let me go! Let me go!" (18) – conveys desperation and adds impact to the 1985 version. Later, when the mouse is pleading with the lion, he says: "Please don't kill me! Please let me go, and I'll help you some day" (19); again, the repetition, this time of "please," adds to the emotional intensity. Although the 1963 version also repeats the word "please," ("Please don't kill me, Mr Lion," he said. "I wanted to see what it was like in your cave, and so I came in. Please don't kill me, and I will not wake you up again" (42)), the extra words in between reduce the impact. The differences in the "gnawing" episode, as shown below, provide a further example of the effective use of repetition, coupled with the triumphant words "right through," in the later version.

"I am only a little mouse,

but how I can gnaw!"

So he gnawed and gnawed at the net. (1963 49)

"I know I'm only a mouse,

but I can gnaw."

The mouse gnawed and gnawed at the net.

He gnawed right through the ropes. (1985 24-25)

In addition to the text changes, the changes in the illustration and design are significant. The 1963 illustrations by Evelyn Clouston do not reflect the dramatic nature of the story, even allowing for the textual portrayal of the mouse as a childlike character. Delicate and whimsical, they show the lion cavorting, more like a happy lamb or dog, within a setting of delicately drawn plants and flowers (see Figure 7.10). In contrast, John Griffith's bold, heavily outlined illustrations in the 1985 version portray an imposing, frightening lion at the forefront of the illustrations with glaring eyes, heavy brows, and prominent claws. On page eighteen, the placement of the mouse's frightened appeal immediately under the illustration almost compels the reader to stop and absorb the full impact of the mouse's predicament before reading on (see Figure 7.11).

The day is hot
 and I did not want to wake up.
 I do not know where you come from,
 but now I will not let you go."
 The little mouse was very frightened.
 "Please don't kill me, Mr Lion," he said.
 "I wanted to see
 what it was like in your cave,
 and so I came in.
 Please don't kill me,
 and I will not wake you up again."
 Now the lion laughed
 to see the mouse so frightened.
 "Why, I am the King of all the animals,
 and I could kill you with one paw,"
 he said.
 "Then you could play no more tricks."

42



43

Figure 7.10. "The Lion and the Mouse" (1963 42-43) illustrated by Evelyn Clouston.

The Lion and the Mouse

an Aesop's fable
pictures by John Griffiths

One hot day,
 a lion was sleeping in his cave.
 Suddenly, a mouse ran over his paw
 and jumped on his nose.
 The lion woke up at once.
 He clapped his paw down
 on the mouse.

"Let me go! Let me go!"
 cried the mouse,
 but the lion had hold of him.



"Little Mouse," said the lion,
 "I will not let you go.
 It's a hot day,
 and I wanted to sleep.
 Why did you wake me up?"

The mouse was very frightened.
 "Don't kill me, Mr Lion," he said.
 "I wanted to see
 what it was like in your cave,
 so I came inside.
 Please don't kill me!
 Please let me go,
 and I'll help you some day."

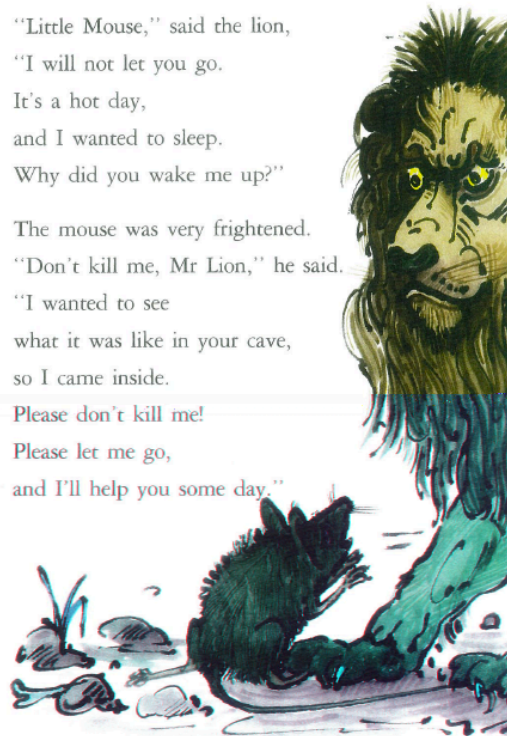


Figure 7.11. "The Lion and the Mouse" (1985 18-19) illustrated by John Griffiths.

In the 1985 version, the mouse is portrayed as a feisty, heroic character. Throughout the story, the careful use of perspective in the positioning of the mouse keeps him prominent within the illustrations while maintaining the significant size difference between the lion and his potential victim.

The characterisation of the mouse in the 1963 version implies a reader in need of reassurance and protection from the realities of life (and death). The changes to the text and illustrations in the 1985 version create a more dramatic and engaging story, and also imply a reader capable of distinguishing between stories and real life. The reversions accord with the NAC script criteria, particularly in regard to pace, characterisation, and the engagement of the reader.

In summary

The changes to the 1980s versions of the three stories discussed above not only enhance their aesthetic and emotional appeal, but also increase the opportunities for reader interaction, providing “gaps” for the reader to fill. Furthermore, they all provide opportunities for readers to build their understanding of themselves and others by vicariously experiencing the dilemmas of the characters.

In this chapter I have discussed two family stories and one traditional tale, genres that were typical of the 1963 series. In the 1975 evaluation, there were many requests from teachers for a much wider range of genres, including fantasy, poetry, and non-fiction. In the following chapters, I explore the contributions of Joy Cowley and Margaret Mahy to the expansion of genre and literary qualities in the revised materials.

Chapter Eight

Joy Cowley: Creating stories with “charm, magic, impact, and appeal”

I have described in earlier chapters the importance placed by the Department of Education of children not only learning to read but *wanting* to read, and the influence of this emphasis on the 1963 Ready to Read series. Yet, while innovative at the time, the realistic settings and storylines of the original series did not require much “stretching” of the imagination. Chapter Seven explores the increased opportunities for reader interaction in the revised versions of three 1963 stories, but it is in the materials newly written for the series that the true extent of the changes becomes apparent. As described in Chapter Five, a large part of the “charm, magic, impact, and appeal” of the revised Ready to Read series was due to Joy Cowley and Margaret Mahy.¹⁰⁸ While Simpson had introduced the concepts of story and reading for meaning into instructional reading materials, Cowley and Mahy were pivotal in exploring the possibilities of literary form and language. Cowley focused on materials for students at the very beginning stages of learning to read, while Mahy’s Ready to Read texts were, for the most part, intended for slightly older readers. Of the nineteen Cowley texts (eighteen stories and one poem) published in the Ready to Read series between 1982 and 1988, fourteen were for students in the first year of school.¹⁰⁹ This chapter explores the literary features of these shorter texts for beginning readers.¹¹⁰

These stories correspond with the values implicit in Meek’s conviction that “what the beginning reader reads makes all the difference to his view of reading”

¹⁰⁸ It is interesting to note that both Mahy and Cowley would have had direct experience of the 1963 Ready to Read series through their own children bringing the books home from school. Mahy discusses *Grandma Comes to Stay* in a 1974 article in *Education*. See Chapter Ten.

¹⁰⁹ A further story and poem were published in the *Junior Journal* in 1984 and 1985.

¹¹⁰ I refer to other examples of Cowley’s writing for Ready to Read in Chapters Ten and Eleven.

(*Learning to Read* 11). Hearne (1992), too, recognises the importance of early reading experiences, observing that “childhood literature stays with and affects the adult relationship with literature throughout a lifetime” (17).

Cowley’s texts, some of which have fewer than sixty words, are rich in literary features and opportunities for reader interaction and imagination. Despite this, there is a notable lack of critical analysis of her writing for beginning readers. In some ways, this is not surprising: instructional reading materials are marketed primarily through educational channels rather than bookshops, and the Ready to Read books themselves are not commercially available at all within New Zealand. Yet there is also, in general, a dismissive attitude among literary critics towards instructional reading materials. Within New Zealand, such materials are not eligible for children’s book awards, other than some industry design awards, which reinforces the notion that there is more recognition and value placed on the appearance of the books than on the writing within them. In her chapter on children’s literature in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Gilderdale writes glowingly about Cowley’s novels and commercial picture books, but does not mention her instructional reading materials at all (this may of course, be a consequence of the lack of easy access to the materials). The individual author entry states that from 1984 Cowley had “published well over a hundred brief story books, many consisting mostly of illustrations, for young children and children learning to read” (649). This statement might be taken to imply not only that the number of books Cowley has published is the most noteworthy aspect of her work (and that the very quantity of her publications must necessarily detract from their quality), but also that the illustrations are of more significance than the text. Somewhat ironically, the year after the publication of *The Oxford History*, Cowley received an OBE for her services to children’s literature, and in 1993, an honorary doctorate from Massey University.¹¹¹ The entry about Cowley (written by Diane Hebley and Nelson

¹¹¹ In 2018, Joy Cowley was appointed a Member of the Order of New Zealand. Her citation refers to her “strong contribution to both literature and literacy” and mentions that “she has written more than 1,000 reading books to assist in teaching reading and associated skills to schoolchildren” (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Wattie) in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998) is slightly more informative. It describes Cowley as “a prolific creator of entertaining and predominantly humorous readers, with a total of more than 400 books for the ‘Storybox’ series and for Wendy Pye Publishing” (115). There is, however, no further discussion of these materials for young readers.

For all that Cowley’s texts for young readers warrant more critical attention, picture books are a combined effort of author, illustrator, and publisher, with the relationship between illustrations and text central to the success of the work.¹¹² Indeed, in a 2011 article, “The Effective Early Reading Book,” Cowley states that, generally, she regards the illustrator as a “co-author” and that she includes illustration notes “that are important to the purpose of the book – helping a child to read” while trying “not to control or inhibit the illustrator’s creativity” (34). Cowley has had more input than many writers into the production of her instructional reading materials, stating, “Over the last 40 years I’ve written about 650 early reading books, and have been involved with the layout and production side of most of them” (*Writing from the Heart* 8).

Cowley’s experimentation with literary forms for beginning readers began as a way of encouraging her son Edward, a reluctant reader. In a 1992 letter to Lois Thompson, Cowley acknowledges the significant influence of Edward’s teacher Gladys Thorley, whose “innovational approach” helped her develop short texts that not only engaged children, but that children could learn to read independently. In the 1960s Cowley had also been a frequent contributor to the *School Journal*, and because of this was invited to a Ready to Read script development workshop held at Tatum Park, Waikanae, in 1978. The workshop provided opportunities for Cowley and fellow writers (in the company of

<https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/honours/lists/ny2018-onz#colesj>). While the citation clearly acknowledges Cowley’s significance to the reading lives of young New Zealanders, it perpetuates the perceived distinction between “literature” and “literacy” (or learning to read) whereas the key feature of Cowley’s texts for young readers (as I demonstrate in this chapter) is the merging of the two.

¹¹² I use publisher here as an inclusive term for all involved in the publication process, including editors and designers.

illustrators, School Publications editors, and art editors) to experiment with script ideas and literary forms. This workshop marked the beginning of the collaboration between Cowley and illustrator Robyn Belton in developing the character of Greedy Cat, who remains a central figure in the Ready to Read series to this day.

Cowley's writing for young readers reflects the spirit of innovation evident in picture book publishing from the 1950s. The popularity of Early Readers such as *The Cat in the Hat*, *Are You My Mother?* and Minarek's *Little Bear* stories had shown that it was possible to create engaging, literary texts with relatively few words that children could enjoy reading for themselves. Many of the picture books published in the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (1967), *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1970), and *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes* (1973) are notable for their patterned language, featuring rhythm, repetition, and (often) rhyme. Some, such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* and *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes* popularised a new text form: humorous chants and rhymes that explore quirky ideas and the sounds of language, but without a narrative thread.

In New Zealand in the 1970s, there was also a significant increase in the publishing of poetry for young children. There had been only two poems in the 1963 Ready to Read series, both by James K. Baxter, in the miscellany *Sliding and Flying*. In 1974 Lansdowne Press published *Poems to Read to Young New Zealanders*, and in 1979 PM began publishing "PM Readalongs," books with large print versions of short poems, including several by James K. Baxter. Altogether, these shorter, linguistically rich picture books and enlarged-text versions of poems were becoming widely used in New Zealand junior classes.

As I shall demonstrate, Cowley's writing for beginning readers draws strongly on the oral traditions of folk tales and rhymes, both in regard to the content and sound of the texts and their reception as a shared literary experience. Hearne, in her discussion of the connection between the oral tradition (in particular the transmission of folktales) and children's books, states that both represent "active, adaptable, practical, negotiable literature" (18). She points out that children's literature is "both iterative and interactive, with reading aloud in the early years

introducing an extra dimension of narration, a storytelling voice that often serves as commentator on the authorial text” (18). Although Hearne is writing here about adults reading aloud *to* children, this applies equally well to New Zealand instructional reading contexts in the early years of school. Reading aloud *to* children and *with* children (in particular, shared reading, where the students can see an enlarged version of the text) is an integral part of reading instruction in junior classes. Reading stories and poems aloud themselves gives children the satisfaction of experiencing the language directly and enabling them to act and sound like readers. Children’s comments and responses within all of these reading contexts shapes and personalises their reception of the text, and builds their awareness of how texts work. In Meek’s words, children learn “the different ways that language lets a writer tell, and the many and different ways a reader reads” (*How texts teach* 21). As we shall see, Cowley’s rhythmic, repetitive, carefully constructed texts invite reader participation.

Stories with very few words

Hearne observes similarities between books for young children and the oral tradition of folk tales in that they have in common “compressed structure and selective detail” and that “[e]very word or line counts in a concentrated form shaped to withstand repetition” (18). We can see this in the approach to literary form and language that Cowley brings to her writing for beginning readers, as in the book, *Old Tuatara*.

Old Tuatara

Old Tuatara (1983, illustrated by Clare Bowes) was one of the first of Cowley’s stories to be published in the Ready to Read series. It is also the shortest, with only thirty-three words. The structure, plot, characterisation, and language in this apparently simple story combine to create the complexity of a literary narrative, requiring a great deal of the reader. It is rich in ambiguity, lulling and surprising the reader by turns.

The text of the story is reproduced below. Figure 8.1 shows the cover and Figure 8.2 shows the inside pages.

Old Tuatara sat in the sun.
 He sat and sat and sat.
 "Asleep," said the fantail.
 "Asleep," said the gull.
 "Asleep," said the frog.
 "Asleep," said the fly.
 "Not asleep," said Old Tuatara.

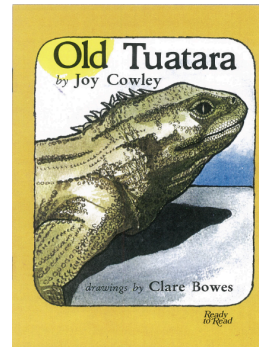


Figure 8.1. *Old Tuatara*.

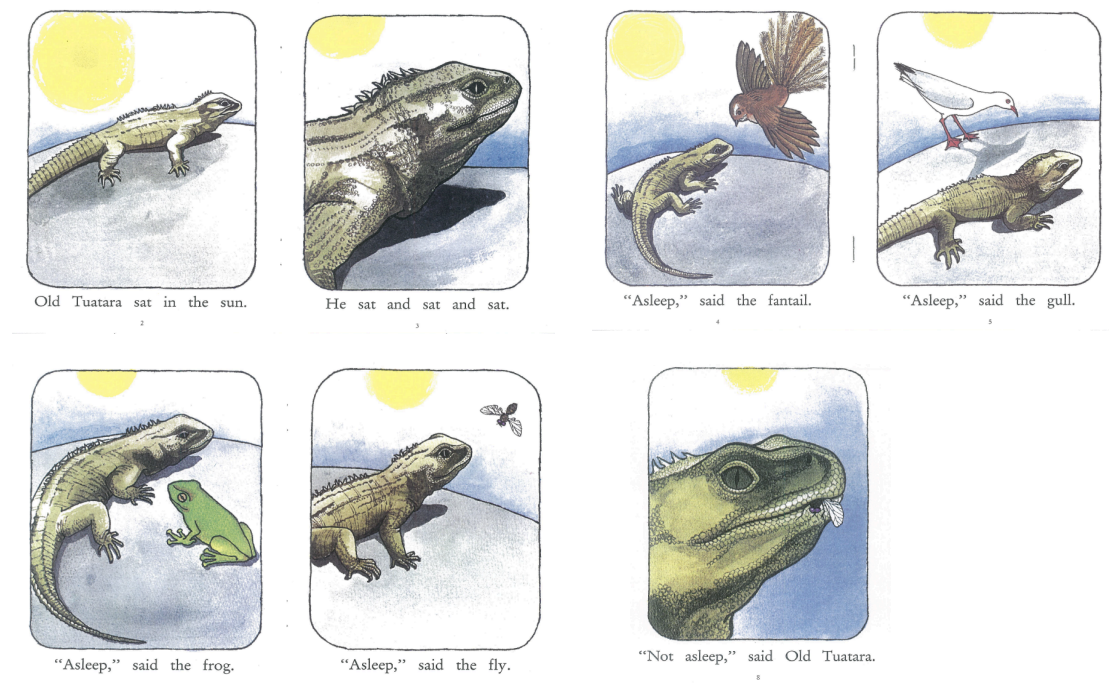


Figure 8.2. *Old Tuatara* (2-8).

The ambiguity begins with the title. The word "Old" suggests both an affectionate name for the tuatara, and a reference to its great age. This great age in itself has two layers of meaning: tuatara can live for up to one hundred years (possibly longer), and their species has survived from the time of the dinosaurs.¹¹³ The tuatara itself is an intriguing creature in its connection to the distant past, its dragon-like appearance (not unlike representations of the

¹¹³ Tuatara are large, extremely rare New Zealand reptiles. They are the only survivors of an order of reptiles that lived in the age of the dinosaurs.

mythical taniwha, as shown in Figure 8.3),¹¹⁴ its large size (they can grow half a metre long and weigh up to one and a half kilograms), and in the fact that it is rarely seen (certainly, few five year olds reading this book are likely to have ever seen one). Naming Old Tuatara rather than referring to him as “the tuatara” helps set up the expectation of a story where animals can speak, and where unexpected or magical things may happen. Already, just from the cover illustration and the title, the reader is presented with many possibilities for “negotiation” of the story.

Cowley takes full advantage of the overlap between realism and fantasy with the story hinging on uncertainty as to whether the tuatara is awake or asleep. It is true that tuatara do sit very still for long periods.¹¹⁵ Page two shows the tuatara basking in the sun, with the facing page showing a close-up view, a repeat of the cover illustration. This could be seen as foreshadowing the view that the fantail, the gull, the frog, and the fly will get of Old Tuatara as they approach him on the following pages. For practical reasons also, the illustrations on these pages need to be at mid-range rather than close-up to create enough room to clearly portray each new character and thus provide support for the reader in attempting the text.

A further element, which may not be noticed on the first reading, is that the tuatara’s eye is open in the illustration on page three (as it is, though less obviously so on other pages), meaning that when the creatures are pronouncing Old Tuatara to be asleep, the reader may already have noticed that he is not. This in turn, creates the possibility of the reader anticipating the danger to the fly as he moves close to the tuatara. A closer examination reveals other clues that Old Tuatara is not asleep. There are slight changes in the positioning of his front legs

¹¹⁴ In the legend “Mako and Tuatara” in Mataira’s 1975 *Maori Legends for Young New Zealanders*, Tuatara is characterised as also being a taniwha.

¹¹⁵ I speak from experience here. I have had the good fortune during the course of my PhD research to work in a university building that includes a tuatara enclosure, where, quite often, tuatara can be seen basking under heat lamps. Even with their eyes open, their utter stillness does indeed give the impression that they are sleeping.

from pages two to six, and, on page seven, he has lifted his head. Although the ending of the story seems surprising, it has in fact been clearly signalled from the beginning. In another twist, rather than the sympathy of the reader being with the smallest character, as is usual in a folktale, factors such as the naming of Old Tuatara (when the other animals are not named), children's experiences of flies as pests, and the intriguing nature of the tuatara mean that sympathy is more likely to be with him.

It is clear that this story offers much for the reader to notice. There is a delightful irony in the realisation, held off until the last page, that the tuatara has the whole time been lying in wait for unsuspecting prey. Subsequent readings have the added element of anticipation of the now-known ending, along with the reader this time knowing more than the fly. The fate of the fly also adds an element of fable, in that the reader sees, in hindsight, how foolish the fly was to get too close to a potential predator. Every rereading of this story is an opportunity for children to build their understanding of texts and reading: they learn about how stories are structured, how illustrations and words work together, about the drama of conflict, and to expect the unexpected. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Bellorin and Silva-Díaz (2012) note the importance of expectation and surprise in helping inexperienced readers learn about literature. They state that children "learn to fill in the gaps of concealment to make predictions, and in the process of rereading, to confirm and correct these predictions in order to achieve closure [...] they become aware of the fact that elements in the text and pictures are not there casually" but are providing "hints and clues" for them to notice and use (117-18).

Old Tuatara also exemplifies "compressed structure and selective detail." Cowley makes full use of the story title, illustrations, repetition, and dialogue to drive the narrative. The title introduces the protagonist (and conveys possibilities about his character), and the first line establishes the situation ("Old Tuatara sat in the sun). In the second line, "He sat and sat and sat," the repetition of "and sat" creates a rhythmic, almost hypnotic effect, conveying the idea of stillness and time passing. The "selective detail" here is the omission of any clue as to whether Old Tuatara was *sleeping* while "he sat and sat." The repetition

may lull the reader into believing the repeated pronouncements of the other characters that the tuatara is asleep, despite the evidence of the open eye in the illustration. Each repetition adds to the impact of the simple but dramatic change in the text pattern on the final page (the addition of the word “not”) and the revelation of Old Tuatara’s intentions. Furthermore, the economy of words in this story parallels Old Tuatara’s economy of movement.

“Charms and riddles”

As discussed in Chapter Two, Frye explores the language of “charms and riddles” in *Spiritus Mundi* (1976). He discusses how the language of “charms” (language imbued with “music, sound and rhythm” (123)) works to lull or hypnotise the reader, achieving “the overwhelming of sense by sound” (124). The language of “riddle” is used for the opposite effect: Frye describes a riddle as “essentially a charm in reverse, representing “the revolt of the intelligence against the hypnotic power of commanding words” (137). He associates the riddle “with comic resolutions, comic recognition scenes of escape or rescue, or with such folktale themes as performing the impossible task” (138). Cowley’s works combine elements of both charms and riddles, often depending for their impact on the contrast between the two. Frye’s analysis here is equally applicable to *Old Tuatara*, where the language of charm is used to lull the reader, and the language of riddle (the addition of “not” to disrupt the pattern) is used to reveal Old Tuatara’s trick.

It is also interesting to consider Frye’s analysis in relation to the context of learning to read. Frye states that charms “can also be social, and one use of repetition is to bind the community into a single enterprise” (128). Although Frye refers to political, religious, military, or commercial contexts (such as advertising), this is equally relevant to the binding, uplifting, entrancing effect of the often formulaic language of oral storytelling and folktales, and the chanting of nursery rhymes by very young children. In the following statement by Frye, replacing the word “compel” with “entrance” or “mesmerise” would exactly describe the experience of children joining in with the reading of a shared text: “you can compel [entrance] by the force of rhythm and sound alone, by getting the right words into the right order at the right speed” (125). This also aligns

with Hearne's observations of the connections between the oral tradition and children's literature.

Patterns of narrative

In addition to her use of the language of "charms and riddles," Cowley draws on other literary conventions, including narrative structures that are typical of folktales. Hearne explores how "very early literature forecasts complex patterns" (25). She cites the example of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, where several elements (the life cycle of a caterpillar, the days of the week, the "holes" tracking the progress of the caterpillar through the pages, the increasing number of food items consumed, and the growing size of the page flaps) combine to clearly forecast the caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly, a "surprise ending" that is not, in fact, really a surprise. In folk tales, it is often a series of similar events (most likely the completion of three tasks or a quest) that signals to the reader that the end is near. This sort of framing is at play in much of Cowley's writing for young readers. Cowley herself has remarked that there "should be a sort of inevitability about the development of the story" (*Writing from the Heart* 13).

Old Tuatara has a distinct beginning, middle, and end. The first two pages set the scene (Old Tuatara having been introduced through the title and cover illustration), and, through repetition of "he sat," these pages reinforce the impression of stillness and sleep. Pages four to seven (the middle) describe a series of events, the repeated language structure reinforcing the idea of the tuatara being asleep (or at least, of the other creatures thinking so). Page eight (the ending) disrupts the language pattern, contradicting the other creatures and showing that Old Tuatara is not (and never was) asleep. The story is also an ironic version of a folktale quest, ironic in that the fact that Old Tuatara has been "hunting" is not revealed until the final page, and that he has achieved success by doing nothing. The life and death conflict that is now apparent demonstrates Crago's description of stories for children as needing to have "an underlying narrative structure that is easily grasped in terms of paired opposites (harm done/harm righted; victim stolen/victim returned etc" (103).

Once the reader knows Old Tuatara's intentions, subsequent readings take on some of the elements of a horror story, anticipating the inevitable progression to the fly's demise. The repeated pronouncements by the characters create a framework similar to that of the traditional chasing game, "What's the time Mr Wolf?" Both the wolf and the children know that eventually, the answer is going to be "dinner time," at which point the children will need to "escape." The similarity of this game to *Old Tuatara* is emphasised by the (perhaps coincidental) inclusion of the book *Taniwha, Taniwha* in the 1980s Ready to Read series. This book is a bilingual version of *What's the time Mr Wolf?* with "Mr Wolf" changed to "Taniwha," and "dinner time" changed to "kai time" in the English-language version. As mentioned previously, the reptilian or dragon-like depiction of the mythical taniwha here has some resemblance to that of Old Tuatara.

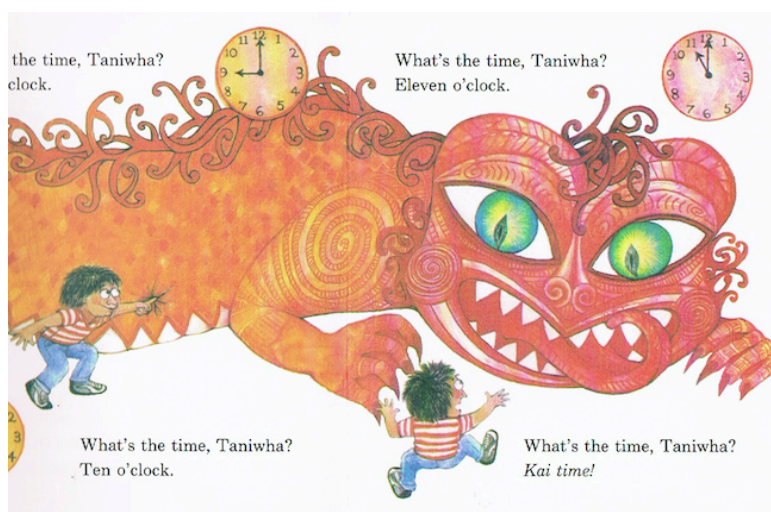


Figure 8.3. Image from *Taniwha, Taniwha*.

Greedy Cat

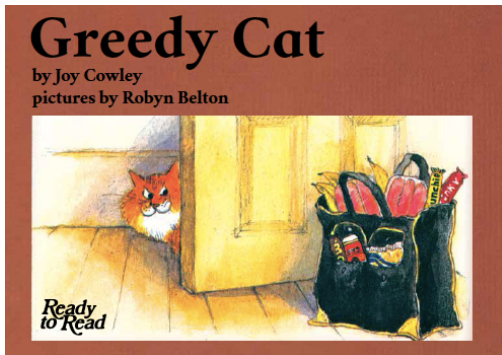


Figure 8.4. *Greedy Cat*.

Greedy Cat (1983), developed in collaboration with illustrator Robyn Belton, is perhaps Cowley's best-known story (and character) within the Ready to Read series.¹¹⁶ The Greedy Cat stories are based on the real-life adventures of a cat belonging to Cowley, while the illustrations of

Mum and Katie are based on Belton and her daughter.

Along with “charm, magic, impact, and appeal,” the literary features within *Greedy Cat* provide extensive opportunities for “creative participation,” a clear example of what Hearne describes as “active, adaptable, practical, negotiable literature” (18). This seemingly simple story about Mum repeatedly going shopping and Greedy Cat gobbling up her purchases has all the elements of high drama: a clash of opposing desires, a series of events inexorably building to an explosive climax, strong characterisation, mesmerising language, and a range of viewpoints that compels reader response.

As with *Old Tuatara*, the title and the cover illustration set the scene. The illustration (Figure 8.4) shows the cat peering around a door with a wicked, calculating expression at a shopping bag loaded with delectable treats.¹¹⁷ The word “Greedy” in the title, the wicked demeanour of the cat, and the items in the shopping bag invite speculation on the part of the reader. The title page illustration shows the cat striding along purposefully, still with a scheming

¹¹⁶ Several more Greedy Cat stories have been published since 1983 but only one, *Greedy Cat is Hungry* (1988), within the period of the Ready to Read Revision and Extension project. More Greedy Cat stories were published in 1995, 1996, 2000, and 2001. As of June 2018, five more Greedy Cat stories are under development.

¹¹⁷ Nowadays, in the interests of healthy eating, there are strict constraints on the types of food that may be referred to in Ministry of Education publications. I recall needing to ask permission to include chocolate cake as part of a pirates' picnic in a Ready to Read book published in 2007. There were clearly no such restrictions in the 1980s.

expression, and one paw outstretched, perhaps reaching for an item out of the bag. Already, with only the title and two illustrations, a story is beginning to take shape. The first double-page spread (as shown in Figure 8.5) has a full-page illustration on the left, introducing the human protagonists (Mum and Katie).¹¹⁸



Figure 8.5. *Greedy Cat*, opening double-page spread.

This illustration is linked by a string of sausages to a smaller illustration of the cat, gobbling the sausages, on the right-hand page. Mum has her back to the cat, deep in thought, holding a piece of paper, presumably a shopping list, and apparently unaware of what the cat is doing. In contrast, Katie is watching Greedy Cat, with her clutched hands and raised eyebrow suggesting a degree of uncertainty. There is a suggestion in Greedy Cat's eyes that he knows he is being watched. In an extra touch of humour, the labels on the items on the shelves spell out the words "LOOK OUT MUM." The layout here with the illustration on the left invites reader speculation *before* they read (or hear) the text on page three. And when they do hear the text, they will discover the quasi-onomatopoeic sound of the refrain, "Gobble, gobble, gobble, and that was the end of that."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Although Katie appears in six illustrations, she is not named, nor acknowledged at all in the written text. She appears again (and is named) in the second story, *Greedy Cat is Hungry*. For convenience, I refer to her as Katie in this discussion of *Greedy Cat*.

¹¹⁹ This is an instance when the literary and instructional features overlap in a satisfying way. This book is intended to be the first Greedy Cat story that children meet at school, through the shared reading approach. Once familiar with this story, the first Greedy Cat book for students to attempt as a guided reading text is *The New Cat* (1995) which explains how Greedy Cat got his name. In *The New Cat*, "gobble, gobble" is used as a

Notably, the text does not state that the cat has eaten the sausages, nor that the woman in the picture is Mum; these ideas are left for the reader to infer. There is also a touch of irony in the last line: although this may have been the end of the sausages, it is clearly not the end of the story. This opening event leaves many questions unanswered: what will happen when Mum sees that the sausages are gone? Will she know it is Greedy Cat who has eaten them? Will Katie tell her mother? and so on. The scenario is repeated on subsequent pages. Mum buys sticky buns, then potato chips, bananas, and chocolate, and each time, Greedy Cat gobbles up the food while Mum seems not to notice. The illustrations on pages four, six, nine, ten, and eleven show Mum with her back to the cat while Katie continues to be a silent observer of the events that her mother does not see. Katie appears to be trying to warn her on pages two and six. On page ten, possibly because she has had no luck in getting her mother's attention, Katie has a determined expression, sitting behind her mother in the bicycle seat, holding grimly to the shopping bag full of chocolate.

While the text (apart from the name of the shopping item) remains the same on each page, the illustrations and the text placement suggest movement towards a climax. On the centre-page spread (pages eight and nine) the text, for the first time, is split over two pages with "Mum went shopping and got some bananas" on page eight and the rest of the text on the facing page. Splitting the text in this way breaks the rhythm established on the previous pages, creating a pause, a moment to contemplate Greedy Cat "stalking" the shopping bag on page eight, and to wonder if perhaps things will be different this time. This builds a frisson of suspense or uncertainty. The illustration on page nine shows Mum and Katie walking home purposefully, apparently in full control of the shopping bag, but somehow, the cat still manages to gobble up the bananas, reinforcing the apparent inevitability of his actions. The text is split in the same way on the following double-page spread (pages ten and eleven) but changes again on the next (see Figure 8.6). This time, there is no text at all on the left-hand page.

refrain, building on the link to the original story, and adding to the pleasure and satisfaction of the reading experience.

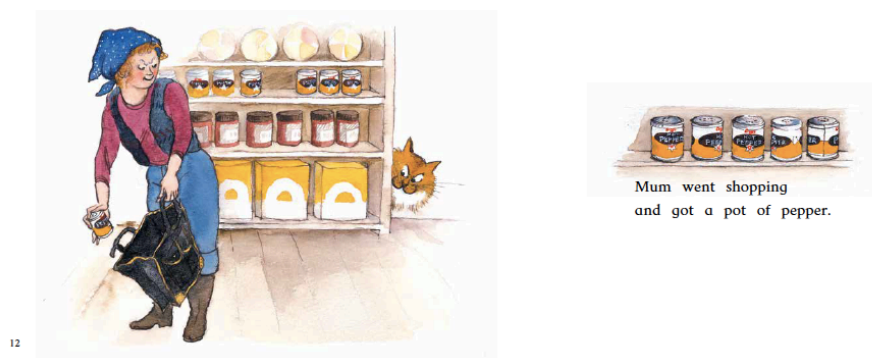


Figure 8.6. *Greedy Cat* (12-13).

Instead the full-page illustration shows Mum, with fiercely drawn eyebrows, putting a container in her shopping bag and looking over her shoulder. She is evidently aware of the cat lurking behind the shelves. Mum looks somewhat villainous and scary (her fierce eyebrows, spotted headscarf, knee boots, cropped pants and waistcoat give her the look of a wicked pirate). She still has her back to the cat but this time, it is deliberate: she is hiding her actions. In several ways, the illustration here mirrors that on page two, but its differences draw attention to how the situation has changed: Mum is aware of the cat; she is dressed for “war”; the cat is physically more present in the illustration. The characters appear to be moving towards an inevitable clash. There is only one sentence on the facing page: “Mum went shopping and got a pot of pepper,” which, along with the depiction of Mum, suggests strongly that she has at last realised what Greedy Cat has been doing, and invites the reader to anticipate her plan. Again, the text layout, with just this one sentence on page thirteen, disrupts the seemingly inevitable cause and effect pattern of the previous pages. This disruption is confirmed on the page turn through the non-completion of the sentence “Gobble, gobble” On page fifteen, the outcome of Mum’s plan becomes both the text and the illustration.



Figure 8.7. *Greedy Cat* (14-16).

This seemingly simple, highly repetitive story (it contains 166 words in total, but with only thirty different words) provides surprisingly little explicit information. It is the reader who is required to “fill in the gaps” and construct the story for themselves, to notice details in the illustrations, to infer the escalating conflict between Mum and Greedy Cat, and to decide where their sympathies lie. The ending also, is left open. Although the immediate problem of Greedy Cat gobbling up the items in the shopping bag appears to have been resolved, the final statement “And that was the end of that!” seems heavily ironic, as if a pot of pepper will be enough to deter a cat as determined, devious, and greedy as this one!

I’m the King of the Mountain

I’m the King of the Mountain (1984) was published in both big book and small book format and is very clearly linked to the oral tradition in that it is based on the traditional rhyme or chant, “I’m the king of the castle.” It also draws on the tradition of trickster stories (as do *Old Tuatara* and *Greedy Cat*), ghost stories, and circular, “never-ending” stories. The story begins with Flea coming down the road singing, “I’m the King of the Mountain,” only to be challenged by Beetle, as shown in Figure 8.8. The illustrations by Dick Frizzell emphasise the difference in size and demeanour of the two creatures.

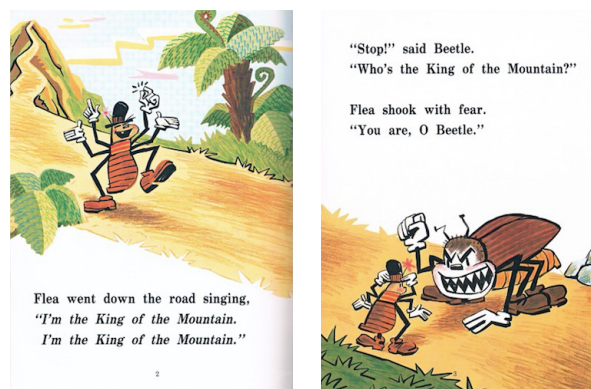


Figure 8.8. *I’m the King of the Mountain* (2-3).

Having terrified Flea, Beetle then goes down the road singing, until he in turn is stopped by Lizard, and so the story continues with the mantle of “King of the

Mountain” passing from Lizard to Rooster, to Dog, to Cow. The illustrations convey over and over the dramatic change from happy singing to fear, as each character is confronted by one who is bigger and fiercer. As in the stories discussed previously, the text patterning (the repeated events and the increase in size of each animal) forecasts an impending climax. When Cow goes down the road singing, she hears a voice in her ear telling her to stop. The change in the language pattern here (see Figure 8.9) confirms this as the climax of the story.

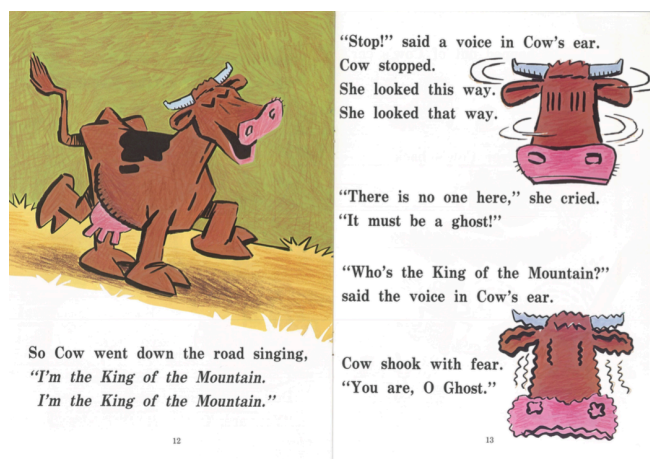


Figure 8.9. *I'm the King of the Mountain* (12-13).

Not being able to see anyone, Cow thinks the voice is that of a ghost and, like all the previous characters, shakes with fear, conceding that the "ghost" is the King of the Mountain. The turn of the page reveals Flea hopping out of Cow's ear and resuming his triumphant singing as he walks down the road. Through trickery, Flea, the smallest character has outwitted a much larger and stronger adversary, and overcome seemingly impossible odds, a true folktale trickster hero. The story, as Cowley states, "empowers the reader ... small is always the winner" ("The Effective Early Reading Book" 28). The folktale framing of this story is further emphasised through the naming of each animal, the fact that they can talk, and the use of literary language, (as in the mode of address "O Beetle" and the phrase "shook with fear"). Undercutting all of this, however, is the ironic humour of the fact that the creatures are fighting over an imaginary title: there is no actual "King" of the mountain.

Number One

Number One (1982), illustrated by Jill McDonald, also plays with the conventions of folktales. It is a humorous inversion of the trickster tale in that the protagonist, the ghost, is initially successful but then has the tables turned on him by one of his potential victims. As we have seen, humour is a cornerstone of Cowley's writing for children. In its manipulation of literary conventions, this story demonstrates Cowley's observation in "The Effective Early Reading Book" that "humour often comes from the juxtaposition of the ordinary and the incongruous or ridiculous" (31).

Number One is also a portal fantasy, though in an inverted sense in that the ghost moves from his "fantasy setting" into the real world, "out of his cupboard, out of his house, and into the town" (2). The ghost at first also seems to be a typical folktale hero setting out on a quest, in this case to frighten people ("Who can I boo?" he says" (2)).¹²⁰ Although it is not apparent at the beginning of the story, there are ultimately three victims, again mirroring the traditional folktale motif of "three tasks." It is also literally a ghost story, emphasised by the depiction of a ghost on the front cover (and a witch on the back), the "spiky" appearance of the print for the title, and the black and white illustrations.^{121 122}

At first the ghost is successful in his quest. A man in a taxi becomes "number one," and a milkman becomes "number two." Then the ghost catches sight of "an

¹²⁰ An early edited copy of this story shows that the original title was "Whoo can I boo?"

¹²¹ Although the black and white of the illustrations seem entirely appropriate here (conveying not only the night setting, the conflict of good and evil, and, perhaps a humorous warning not to look at things in "black and white") this was not the original plan. The illustrator, Jill McDonald, died before the final art could be completed and the decision was made to continue with the black and white illustrations used for trial. I agree with Greg O'Brien's observation in *A Nest of Singing Birds* that this was an "inspired" decision (68).

¹²² That *Number One* is a ghost story was problematic for some. In November 1987, the principal of Linden School returned the school's copies of the book along with a letter describing it as "questionable material" and as "an extremely poor type of book to introduce to very young children". The principal went on to request "more pleasant and wholesome books for the Ready to Read programme."

old, old woman” sitting by a window, and decides that she will be his “number three.” The accompanying illustration shows that the old woman has a hooked nose and a warty chin and is wearing a black hat (see Figure 8.10).

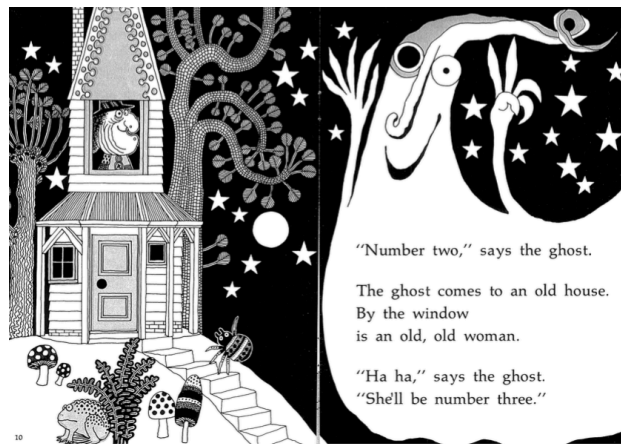


Figure 8.10. *Number One* (10-11).

None of these features appear significant to the ghost but they certainly do for the child reader, creating the effect of a humorous “pantomime moment.” Cowley positions the reader as knowing more than the characters, which enables the reader to “forecast” the likely outcome of the story. When the unsuspecting ghost “boos” her, the witch, instead of running away in fear like the first two victims, leans towards him and says, “Hullo ghost.” At this point, the ghost suddenly realises that his intended victim is “a horrible, terrible witch” and runs away (see Figure 8.11). The story ends with the witch saying “Number one!”



Figure 8.11. *Number One* (12-13).

The dramatic contrast between the ghost’s expectations on page eleven and his shock on page thirteen is highly entertaining, particularly because all the

witch has done is say, “hullo.” Her final words create ironic ambiguity, suggesting the beginning of another story rather than simply the end of this one. The words also provide a new and unexpected interpretation of the title of the story. Cowley is inviting the reader here to enjoy playing with stereotypical ideas about witches and ghosts. There is plenty of scope for readers to negotiate meaning, and to speculate about why the ghost is so scared.

Jill McDonald’s illustrations add to the ambiguity and humour of the story. The illustration on page twelve (shown in Figure 8.11) shows the witch seemingly jumping out at the ghost (rather like a jack-in-the-box), mirroring the stance of the ghost jumping out at his previous victims. There is also an interesting visual link in relation to the fingers of the ghost and the witch. Both are portrayed as having long, curved fingers, and using their fingers to count their victims, drawing attention to the fact that the witch’s “Number One” has replaced the ghost’s expected “Number Three” (and of course, adding to the significance to the story title).

Our Teacher, Miss Pool

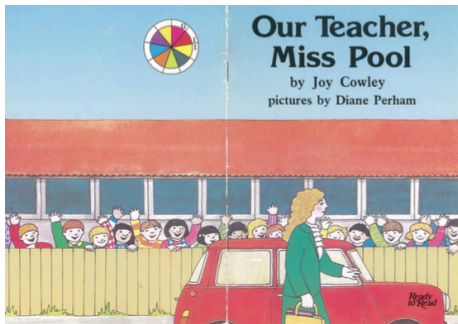


Figure 8.12. *Our Teacher, Miss Pool*.

My final example is, again, a very short story, containing only sixty-one words. *Our Teacher, Miss Pool* (1983), illustrated by Diane Perham, is rich in ambiguity and humour. Cowley skilfully weaves elements of folktale and fantasy, creating a story of almost unlimited possibilities. This story is of

particular interest in that it is, itself, the sort of story that children might construct with their teacher at school. It is a common New Zealand classroom practice for classes to create their own “big books” or wall stories based on stories they have read or experiences they have shared.

As in *Old Tuatara* and *Greedy Cat*, the ambiguity begins with the title. The word “our” implies, but does not confirm, that the story is being told in the first person, by a child (or children) in Miss Pool’s class. The cover illustration shows the children cheering Miss Pool as she arrives at school, suggesting that she is

very popular.¹²³ It is unclear, however, if this is happening at the beginning or the end of the story. The title page shows Miss Pool looking thoughtful. She is wearing different clothes to those in the cover illustration, and there is no apparent link between these two illustrations. The story proper begins on page two, where it is revealed that Miss Pool's car has broken down and she is worried about how she is going to get to school. Some children may notice that Miss Pool is wearing the same clothes here as on the title page, suggesting that she may be thinking about her transport problem. So far, this story seems quite straightforward and credible. On the following page, however, the story suddenly takes off (literally) with the revelation that Miss Pool has decided to travel to school by hang-glider. The story is framed by the days of the week: on Tuesday she travels by motor bike, on Wednesday by balloon, on Thursday by roller skates, and on Friday by elephant. This story has a circular structure similar to that of *I'm the King of the Mountain*, in that it ends where it starts, back at Miss Pool's house on Saturday with Miss Pool fixing her car.¹²⁴ There is an added element of humour in the contrast between the cover illustration, which shows Miss Pool dressed very conservatively in a suit with a ruffled blouse, and the other illustrations, which show her in "action clothing," including her Saturday overalls.

At a surface level, this is an entertaining story about an adventurous teacher. If we explore this story more closely, however, a myriad of questions arise. As mentioned above, the reader is left to infer who is telling the story, and from that flows further questions: Could any of this be true? Is it based on something that really happened? Have the children in Miss Pool's class made up the story? Is it a fantasy story about a teacher with magical powers? Perhaps Cowley is playing here with the idea of the exalted opinion that many young children have of their

¹²³ The sequel to this book, *Where is Miss Pool?* builds on the idea of Miss Pool's popularity. In the sequel, the illustrations show graffiti on the school fence stating "Miss Pool is our teacher." I discuss this further in Chapter Ten.

¹²⁴ There seem strong (and entertaining) connections to Cowley's own life experiences in this story. Cowley describes her own love of motorbikes, her familiarity with their mechanical aspects, and her passion for flying (and gaining her pilot's licence) in *Navigation: A Memoir* (70-75).

teachers. Whatever the interpretation of the story, the opportunities for exercising the imagination are evident. Cowley has created a story of magical possibilities within a framework that invites children to populate it with their own characters and ideas. In so doing, she has expanded children's horizons not only as readers but as storytellers. This is indeed "active, adaptable, practical, negotiable literature."

"Real" stories

As described in Chapter Five, the 1980s Ready to Read series developers set out to deliberately blur the line between instructional reading materials and picture books to produce books "which, in appearance, appeal, and quality of story, can take their place alongside the best of children's picture-story books [...] which look like and are "real" books containing stories which are "real" stories" (Leckie 45-46). Cowley has played a pivotal role in showing how the qualities of literary texts can be incorporated into instructional materials of very few words, creating "real" stories that help children become "real" readers. The Ready to Read stories discussed here, for all their apparent simplicity, are rich in literary features that entice reader interaction and build children's understandings of how stories work, paving "the way by which readers are made, namely by reading books and enjoying them" (Meek *How texts teach* 9).

Chapter Nine

Margaret Mahy: “One great frolic with words”¹²⁵

By the time of the Ready to Read revision process, Margaret Mahy was already well established as a writer of children’s stories. She had been contributing stories and poems to the *School Journal* since 1961 and had begun to make her mark internationally in 1969 when five of her *School Journal* stories were published as picture books.¹²⁶ As well as writing for children, Mahy was a perceptive and eloquent literary commentator, both in regard to her own writing and the writing of others. Excerpts from articles she wrote for *Education* in the 1970s and 1980s are included in this chapter. In “Who’s afraid of the big bad stereotype?” (1974) Mahy shared her thoughts about instructional reading materials, stating, “I do not think it is impossibly ambitious to think of the first readers as potential literature in so far as literature is a wedding of work, thought, laughter, and dream” (28). She went on to express her opinion (similar to that of Lewis, cited in Chapter One) that many current “readers for young children ... are rather deadly,” and that she would “hate the job” of writing them (28). Mahy did, however, respond to this challenge when, along with Joy Cowley, she was asked to take a leadership role at Ready to Read script development workshops. She also submitted many of her own scripts, most of which were fantasy stories. By 1988, nineteen stories and two poems by Mahy had been published in the Ready to Read series.

“A properly functioning imagination”

My particular interest in education is perhaps the education of the imagination, for I believe a properly functioning imagination to be as much a part of a human being as a good clean liver.¹²⁷

Just as in her commercially published works, in her writing for Ready to Read, Mahy creates opportunities for the “creative participation” of the reader (Iser

¹²⁵ Mahy uses this phrase in an interview, “One great frolic with words,” about her writing (after winning the Esther Glen award for the second time) in *Education*, vol. 22, no. 6, 1973, p. 6.

¹²⁶ These books were published in New York by Franklin Watts, and in London by Dent.

¹²⁷ “Educating the imagination.” *Education*, vol. 24, no. 9, 1975, p. 18.

The Implied Reader 275). She plays with language, humorously subverting conventions and stereotypes. She writes: “Humour so often springs from the sudden dissolving of stereotypes, in the contrast between unconscious expectation and what actually happens,” and that “[i]f only first readers [i.e. texts used for instructional reading] could involve more genuine gaiety and laughter they would encourage a flexibility of mind in children” (“Who’s afraid of the big bad stereotype?” 28). Mahy’s concern for “flexibility of mind” resonates with the aim of the series developers to create materials that “allow a reader to develop a better understanding of him/herself, or his/her family, or human or natural behaviour, or his own world” (National Advisory Committee 1980).

In a 1982 article, “Countries of the Mind: Books and environment in childhood,” Mahy refers to her writing as “being about suburbia – about libraries, councillors, supermarkets, accountants, and so on, even though the suburbs are populated by dragons and witches as well as people” (4).¹²⁸ Between 1982 and 1988, Mahy wrote seven stories, all illustrated by Deidre Gardiner (a School Publications Branch art editor), featuring a crocodile protagonist.¹²⁹ Five of the stories (shown in Figure 9.1) were published as stand-alone books for shared reading, and two further stories were included in miscellanies for small-group guided reading. Although the illustrations and design clearly present this set of seven as a single set of stories, two of them, *The Crocodile’s Christmas Jandals* and

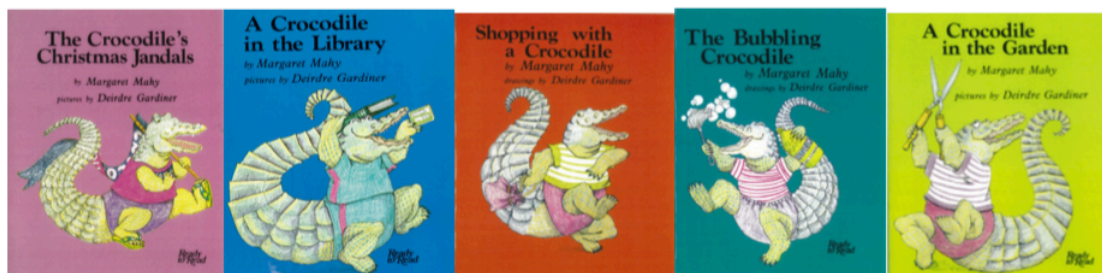


Figure 9.1. The five stand-alone crocodile books.

¹²⁸ *Education*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1982.

¹²⁹ One of the stories, “Christmas Shopping with the Crocodile” was published in *Junior Journal* 1, 1984. Although the *Junior Journal* is not the focus of this thesis, I have included this story in my discussion of the crocodile stories.

“Crocodile Lake” (in the miscellany, *Crinkum-Crankum*) differ from the other stories in regard to narrative style and their characterisation of the crocodile. The crocodile depicted in these two stories is articulate and civilised while the crocodile in the other five stories is a creature of wild passions and unpredictable behaviour. I begin with a discussion of the “wild” crocodile stories.

Mahy’s exploration of the humorous possibilities of a crocodile living in a human world creates a disconcerting but engaging reading experience. This crocodile lives with a boy and his mother. The boy, who is also the narrator of the stories, acts as the crocodile’s minder, guiding him through the chaos and predicaments he creates as he participates in a world in which he does not quite fit. The crocodile has many of the characteristics of an impulsive and determined two-year-old: “But tonight the crocodile is fretful and grizzly. He wants to wash for a change. I know it’s no use saying ‘No,’ so I take the teatowel. Now the crocodile is in high spirits. He grins and frisks, waving the dish mop” (*The Bubbling Crocodile* 3). The crocodile does not speak and cannot read, but instead communicates through his actions, which are “translated” for the reader by the boy: “The crocodile curled his tail into a question mark, meaning ‘How will we cut the hedge with broken clippers?’” (*A Crocodile in the Garden* 9). In *Shopping with a Crocodile*, when the boy takes him to the supermarket, the crocodile insists on sitting in the shopping trolley: “The crocodile snaps his jaws, meaning ‘Faster! Faster!’” (7).

Underlying the crocodile’s humorous escapades is an ever-present undercurrent of unpredictability and danger. The crocodile induces fear or irritation in other characters, who refer to him variously as a “monster,” “great snapping reptile” (*Shopping with a Crocodile* 3 4), and “your great lizard” (“Christmas Shopping with the Crocodile” 12). In *A Crocodile in the Library*, when the crocodile is trying to do a jigsaw puzzle, the boy explains: “Crocodile claws aren’t made for such delicate work. When the pieces won’t fit, he gets angry and snaps his jaws at a little boy” (5). In “Christmas Shopping with the Crocodile,” the crocodile terrifies the in-store Santa Claus by leaping onto his lap to get a lolly and a balloon.

Bettelheim (*The Uses of Enchantment*) suggests that within fairy tales, animals often represent powerful instincts that need to be controlled. Mahy's inclusion of this wild and unpredictable crocodile in these suburban stories invites a similar interpretation. While the crocodile is impetuous and led by emotion and instinct, the boy is the voice of reason and rational thought. Through his ability to acknowledge and manage the crocodile's behaviour, and by describing events and adding his own commentary and explanations, the boy shows that he has (at least some) control over the crocodile's impulses. The boy responds to those impulses with a mixture of patience, insight, and resourcefulness. In *Shopping with a Crocodile* when the boy and the crocodile are in the supermarket and the crocodile wants a new red-striped toothbrush, the boy explains: "Of course I get him a red-striped one. Otherwise he will make a terrible fuss, snapping his jaws and rocking the trolley. When you go shopping with a crocodile, you have to be understanding" (8).

Mahy remarks on the importance of imagination in being able to "bridge the gap between the rational and intuitive aspects of human thought and feeling" ("Educating the imagination" 18). The stories about the boy and the crocodile might be seen as representing these two aspects. By creating an imaginary situation where the crocodile is a creature of impulse, and the boy is able to control and divert him, Mahy creates insight into the "inner landscape of a personality" ("One great frolic" 4). This in turn provides opportunities for readers to build their understanding of themselves and others.

A closer look at *The Bubbling Crocodile* demonstrates the many opportunities it provides for readers to enjoy this contrast between the rational and the intuitive, and to exercise their "properly functioning imagination[s]". The title and cover illustration (showing a happy prancing crocodile holding a dish mop and a bottle of detergent) indicate straight away that this crocodile is unusual. The label on the detergent bottle "SUP__ FOAM __" provides intriguing snippets of information, and the instruction "Use 2 drops only" is likely to alert any child familiar with fairy tales or stories like *A Fish Out of Water* (Palmer 1961) to the potential dangers of ignoring such a warning.

The story begins, as so often in Mahy's writing, with no explanation of the context: "After dinner, the crocodile and I have to do the dishes. I wash and he dries" (3).¹³⁰ The illustration shows the boy and the crocodile at the sink. The stacks of dishes include three cups, plates, and bowls, implying the presence of at least one other character. The boy's narration and the expressions on his face in the illustrations (as shown in Figure 9.2) provide humorous commentary.¹³¹



Figure 9.2. *The Bubbling Crocodile* (4 5 7).

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Mahy wants the reader to participate in the same sort of exploration of possibilities that she has done in writing the story. We see the humorous juxtaposition of the practical and sensible (what the crocodile has observed and knows is the right thing to do) with what his crocodile nature impels him to do. He carefully scrapes the scraps into a bowl for the hens but then eats the scraps himself. Next he squeezes the whole bottle of detergent into the washing up water, disregarding the warning ("Use two drops only") that has featured in the preceding illustrations. The boy's

¹³⁰ The only other reference to the circumstances of the family occurs in *A Crocodile in the Garden*, where the boy reveals that the family live in a flat with a shared garden (with their half "weedier and wilder" than that of their neighbour) and that "most of our things were old" (2). The boy's mother appears only in *The Bubbling Crocodile*.

¹³¹ It is interesting to note the resemblance in illustrative style between Gardiner's illustrations for the crocodile stories and those of Helen Oxenbury in *The Dragon of an Ordinary Family* (1969). The demeanour of the crocodile is also reminiscent of Sendak's illustrations for *Alligators All Around* (1962).

comment, “I don’t stop him. Let him find out for himself about detergent if he wants to be the washer-up” (5), suggests the futility of trying to intervene. As a consequence of the crocodile’s profligacy with the detergent, the kitchen starts to fill with bubbles, an outcome that is at first celebrated by the crocodile, unaware as he is of the potential for danger, but that soon becomes overwhelming: “I am frightened. So is the crocodile. I stand on him and he tries to stand on me” (10). The crisis is averted when the mother, unaware of their predicament, opens the kitchen door and the bubbles float away.

The crocodile’s inability to read and talk is implicitly associated with a lack of knowledge and experience. Certainly, he appears unable (or unwilling) to think beyond the immediate consequences of his actions. Not only is he unaware of what will happen when he squeezes the whole bottle of detergent into the sink, but also (once the bubbles start to form), he is so enchanted with them that he does not realise the impending danger. Similarly, in *A Crocodile in the Garden*, when the family’s neighbour Mr Hedgerow buys new garden tools, the crocodile is very interested in them and refuses to stay in his half of the garden: “the crocodile kept creeping closer and closer to the other side, staring with his yellow crocodile eyes. Mr Hedgerow pretended we were not there. You could easily tell he was not too keen on being stared at by a crocodile!” (4). When Mr Hedgerow leaves the tools unattended, the crocodile investigates the “very shiny and very sharp” garden clippers, but accidentally breaks them because “he didn’t know his own strength” (6).

While clearly wild and unpredictable, the crocodile is also endearing, both in his emotional and dramatic responses, and in his love of beautiful things, including stories. In *A Crocodile in the Library*, when the librarian finds him a book about crocodiles, “He does a little dance. He hugs the book to his scaly heart” (12). He is delighted, too, in *The Bubbling Crocodile*, with the promise of a story. Earlier in *The Bubbling Crocodile*, when he and the boy are in danger of being overwhelmed by bubbles, the boy explains that the crocodile “is not listening. He is too enchanted by the beautiful bubbles. This crocodile is a great lover of beauty” (6). In *A Crocodile in the Garden*, when the crocodile has to cut the hedge with his crocodile jaws (because he has broken the clippers), he gets carried

away and begins to cut shapes in the hedge, creating a rooster, an elephant, a clown, a cat, and “a beautiful frisking crocodile just like himself” (12). When Mrs Hedgerow sees the hedge, she is delighted and describes it as “a work of art” (15).

The crocodile depicted in the other two stories, “Crocodile Lake” and *The Crocodile’s Christmas Jandals*, is distinguished from the “wild” crocodile by his ability to use language and to think rationally. Unlike his inarticulate counterpart, this crocodile lives an independent life (without the need of a minder), interacting positively with both humans and other crocodiles. There is no boy in these stories to “translate” the crocodile’s actions for the reader; instead, the stories are told in the third person by an omniscient narrator.

This crocodile, too, is a “lover of beauty,” and it his love of beautiful things that drives the stories. In “Crocodile Lake” he wants “to wear a frilly pink dress and ballet shoes, and to dance in a ballet” (46). Despite being told by his teacher that crocodiles can’t point their toes and “a “frilly crocodile looks silly,” when Sally O’Mally falls ill, the crocodile seizes his chance to dance the lead in Swan Lake. As in the wild crocodile stories, Mahy takes full advantage of his crocodilian features to create humour. The crocodile wears one ballet shoe (on his tail) and the reader discovers that “Crocodiles don’t point their toes – they point their tails instead. How the crocodile spun! How the crocodile leaped! He always landed on the tip of his tail” (52-53).

In *The Crocodile’s Christmas Jandals*, the crocodile is enchanted with the “blue jandals with golden stars and silver moons” that his Aunt Alligator has given him and feels, when he wears them, that his feet are “walking in party time” (3). He is very upset when the sea washes away one of his precious jandals, leaving a red, rubber jandal in its place. Rather than “snapping his jaws” like his wild counterpart, however, he has control of his emotions. He drags his tail sadly and is able to articulate his feelings: ““You’ve brought me the wrong one!’ said the crocodile crossly to the waves” (6). Later, when he sees a girl at a football match (the Crocodiles playing the Girls and Boys) wearing his missing jandal, they discuss the situation, and are both happy to keep wearing the odd jandals (an implicit indication of a new friendship) while they watch the football: “The crocodile cheered for the Crocodiles, but sometimes he cheered for the Girls and

Boys – just for a change” (13). The crocodile and the girl swap their jandals at the end of the day. This capacity to defer fulfilment and to use language to reason and express emotions is in strong contrast to the impetuosity of the wild crocodile.

Fairy tale foundations

Several of Mahy’s Ready to Read stories, while set in suburbia, evoke a fairy tale context through magical events, witches and spells, villains and heroes, and happy endings, but with humorous, often thought-provoking twists. As we shall see, Mahy’s stories, both fantastic and realistic, suggest an underlying belief in a sense of order and justice and in the power of reason and language to overcome problems. When characters encounter predicaments or are at risk of danger, it is often their ability to think and talk (to persuade or charm, including the use of magic words) that resolves the situation.

“Crinkum-Crankum” centres on conflict between a bad-tempered witch and a fairy godmother. Each time the witch casts a spell on the tree (“Grow crooked,” “Grow lazy, grow crazy,” “Grow crinkum-crankum”), the fairy godmother comes up with a counter-spell (“Grow sweet,” “Grow golden,” “Grow safe”). The witch is incensed to discover that her spells, in combination with those of the fairy godmother, have had the opposite effect to what she intended. When she hears the children describe the tree as “the best tree in town [...] a crooked, lazy-crazy, crinkum-crankum tree, sweet, and golden, and just right for us,” she is so angry that she bursts “like a black balloon” (36).

Words are powerful, too, in *The Great Grumbler and the Wonder Tree*. In a twist on the idea of having three wishes, Mr Finch, “the great grumbler,” finds he has to face the consequences of his grumbling (in effect, his “wishes”). The story begins when, in response to her husband’s incessant grumbling about the meals she serves him, Mrs Finch seeks the help of Gretel the garden witch. Gretel gives her a seed for a wonder tree and the magic words to make it grow: “Feed me, weed me, water me well. What will I grow to? Who can tell?” (5). The wonder tree provides whatever food Mr Finch asks for, but when he continues to grumble, he discovers, to his horror, that the food can talk: “‘Eat me!’ screamed the soup, crossly. ‘Don’t keep me waiting! You’re wasting my time!’” (11). Mr

Finch is compelled to eat everything he has wished for – he is forced, almost literally to eat his words.

Mrs Bubble's Baby uses the fairy tale convention of a spell or instruction that is not followed correctly, as in "The Sweet Porridge" (a traditional tale included in both the 1963 and 1980s series) or *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. This story also echoes *The Three Bears*, or indeed, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in its motif of the baby being too big, too small, or just right.

Mrs Bubble (there is no mention of a Mr Bubble) is anxious about the size of her baby, who is indeed unnaturally small: "he ate a crumb of bread and drank a drop of milk" in contrast to "the other babies in the street" who each "ate a slice of bread and drank "a bottle of milk" (2).¹³² Diane Perham's illustrations playfully explore the possibilities created by Mahy's text. The magical nature of this story (and the invitation for children to use their imaginations) is apparent on the cover, showing a baby with fairies (in bubbles) around him, and the title page, which shows Mrs Bubble holding an improbably tiny baby. The fantastical nature of the story is confirmed through the fanciful names of the characters, the statement that "Doctor Fixer was not an ordinary doctor" (3), the doctor's wild hairstyle and her magic bagpipes on page three, and (for sharp-eyed students), her framed "DEGREE IN MAGICAL MEDICINAL MUSIC" hanging on the wall. Doctor Fixer tells Mrs Bubble what to do to solve her problem but also warns her: "Mrs Bubble, listen carefully. Only play the magic bagpipes and sing the song *once*. That will be quite enough" (4). On page five, when Mrs Bubble first plays the bagpipes, the illustration reveals that the bagpipes have a face that looks very like a snake, a sign perhaps that Mrs Bubble should take care.

Clearly, children with "properly functioning imagination[s]" will anticipate Mrs Bubble's disregard for the warning, and delight in the baby's rapid expansion in size, which continues even after Mrs Bubble decides he is big

¹³² Mahy is also having fun here with the idea of parental competitiveness in regard to the size of babies. Since the 1920s in New Zealand, all new parents have been given books by the Plunket Society in which to record the baby's weight and height and plot them on a graph showing national norms. Plunket nurses are community nurses specialising in supporting parents in caring for young children.

enough. Mahy's lists of food expand (along with the baby) from "a whole slice of bread" and "a whole bottle of milk," to "a whole loaf," then "five loaves," and to "four bottles of milk," and then "a bucket of milk" (6-9).¹³³ The baby keeps growing and becomes almost monstrous, shouting for more dinner. Passers-by no longer recognise the baby as human: "Everybody stopped. Everybody stared. 'It's a balloon,' said the butcher. 'It's a bun,' said the baker" (11). Mahy relieves the tension by replacing the third member of the traditional rhyme ("the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker") with a Plunket nurse who exclaims, "Bless me! It's the biggest baby in town" (11). The irony here is that having the biggest baby in town is exactly what Mrs Bubble had wanted. Doctor Fixer comes to the rescue, singing a spell: "A little, little tune on my fiddle dee dee, / A song for a baby who is wee, wee, wee!" (14) to undo Mrs Bubble's excesses and to remind her of the importance of self-control: "Doctor Fixer looked at Mrs Bubble sternly. 'Magic is like medicine,' she said. 'Too much is bad for you'" (14).

Two further Mahy stories that explore the power of reason and language within a fairy tale framework are "Giant Soup" and "Horrapapotchkin!"¹³⁴ In both stories, the child protagonists face the prospect of being eaten. In "Giant Soup," a giant wants to add Jason to the soup he is making, but the twist in the story is that the giant is not sure about how to make soup, while Jason, an avid reader of cookbooks, is. The advice Jason gives the giant about soup making has a similar effect to that of a spell or magic words in a fairy tale in that it enables Jason's escape. The illustration (by Robyn Belton) shown in Figure 9.3 shows Jason in the cauldron surrounded by letters (alphabet soup) forming the words "GIANT SOUP." This is Belton's visual interpretation of the idea implied by the story that Jason is protected by the knowledge he has gained through reading. This story is delightfully ambiguous in that the reader is never certain if Jason actually realises the danger he is in. It may be that Jason is deliberately tricking the giant into letting him go, but it may be that his desire to help a fellow cook has blinded

¹³³ This is similar to the expanding diet of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* as discussed in Chapter Eight.

¹³⁴ The titles of these two stories and of "Crinkum-Crankum" are also the titles of the miscellanies in which they appear.

him to the fact that he is one of the ingredients. Whatever the motivation, Jason's "escape" comes about because the giant wants to get rid of him; Jason is drinking too much of the soup as he taste-tests it: "He quickly took Jason out of the soup. 'There will be no soup left for me,' he said" (50). When Jason offers to come back and help the giant bake a cake on the following day, the giant is horrified and tells him never to come back because he eats too much.

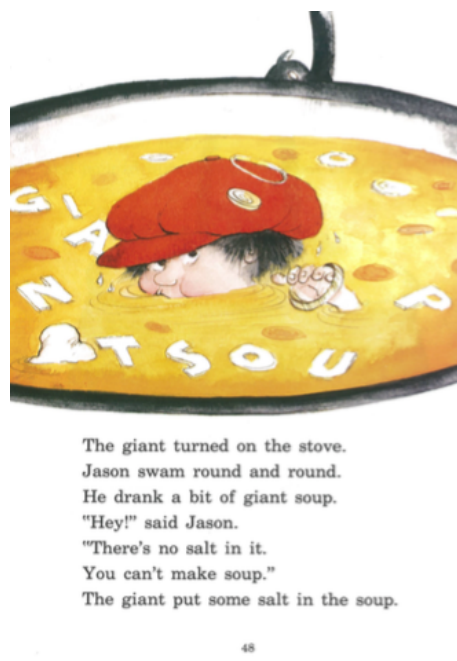


Figure 9.3. "Giant Soup" (48).

In "Horrapotchkin!" Simon is faced with the prospect of being eaten by a lion. Like Jason, Simon keeps a cool head and is a quick thinker, managing to talk the lion out of eating him for his birthday dinner by introducing the idea of ice cream as an alternative party food. While Simon's persuasion, or more accurately, his diversion of the lion lacks the more formulaic or magical structure of a recipe as in "Giant Soup," or of spells (as in "Crinkum-Crankum," *The Great Grumbler*, and *Mrs Bubble's Baby*), his words still exert power. Mahy adds a magical touch (the language of riddles) in this story through her use of the made-up word "*Horrapotchkin!*" (italicised in the story). As discussed in Chapter Eight, Frye describes a riddle as "essentially a charm in reverse, representing 'the revolt of the intelligence against the hypnotic power of commanding words' (137). He goes on to say that "riddle is connected with comic resolutions, comic recognition scenes of escape or rescue, or with such folktale themes as

performing the impossible task" (138). Mahy uses the word "*Horrapotchkin!*" as an exclamation at pivotal points of the story. It indicates the change in viewpoint in the text from that of the lion and his mother to that of Simon, the potential victim:

It was the lion's birthday.
 "What are we going to have for dinner?"
 he asked his mother.
 "Something very nice," said his mother.
 She came out with the birthday dinner.
Horrapotchkin!
 The birthday dinner was Simon! (20)

On page twenty-two, Mahy uses the word to indicate Simon's urgency in thinking of a solution to his dilemma ("Simon didn't want to be eaten – not on the day before his birthday. He thought very hard. *Horrapotchkin!* 'Well, what about ice cream?' asked Simon"). The word occurs for the third time after the lion has tasted the birthday cake, as an exclamation of delight, and possibly, relief, for Simon and the other human guests at his birthday party: "The lion went to Simon's birthday party the next day. *Horrapotchkin!* He did like birthday cake after all" (26-27). The juxtaposition of the word with these events makes it seem as if the word itself has magical power.¹³⁵

Mahy adds a further twist to this story by having Simon, once he is out of danger, invite the lion to his own birthday party the next day rather than just taking the opportunity to escape (much the same as Jason's offer to come back and help the giant). This suggests that Simon is choosing to confront and control his fear of the lion. The reader discovers at the end of the story, however, that Simon is not oblivious to the risk the lion presents, and "always keeps a bit of birthday cake in his pocket. *Just in case!*" (27).

¹³⁵ Mahy also uses "*Horrapotchkin!*" in *The Crocodile's Christmas Jandals* for the crocodile's exclamation of distress when he discovers the loss of his jandal (6).

While there is a satisfying come-uppance for the witch in “Crinkum-Crankum,” and Mr Finch in *The Great Grumbler*, a recurring theme in Mahy’s fairy-tale style stories (as in her crocodile stories discussed previously) is that of “building bridges,” of looking at things in a different way, of understanding and acknowledging other points of view, and of learning new things. The challenges of having wild, unpredictable creatures (lions, crocodiles, giants, witches) living within a human community and the ability of the human characters to manage these challenges returns us to a consideration of the relationship between “the rational and intuitive aspects of human thought and feeling” (“Educating the imagination” 4). Significantly, neither the giant nor the lion suffer any ill effects from the actions of Jason or Simon. Rather than being vanquished, the giant is left bemused (though a little more knowledgeable about how to make soup), and the lion has learned that there are alternatives to conventional lion-like ways of behaving and eating. Both Jason and Simon are prepared to return to the situation of danger (Jason offering to help the giant bake a cake, and Simon inviting the lion to his party). Rather than creating conventional fairy tale endings where evil is punished and good is triumphant, Mahy treads a middle path. The contrasts in her Ready to Read stories are not so much between good and evil as between ignorance and knowledge, self-centredness and awareness of others, inflexibility and flexibility of mind, creating insights that enable readers to develop better understandings of themselves and their own worlds.

Stories of real life

I believe that any commonplace object has a capacity to become
a thing of wonder ... I try to suggest the ordinary/miraculous
double nature of things. ¹³⁶

Not all of Mahy’s stories involve fantasy, but even her apparently realistic stories evoke magical possibilities. These evocations are achieved partly by plot and partly by language, blurring the distinction between reality and fantasy.

“Dry Days for Climbing George,” illustrated by Bob Kerr within the miscellany

¹³⁶ “One great frolic with words.” *Education*, vol. 22, no. 6, 1973, p. 5.

Dog Talk, has perhaps one of the most realistic contexts of all of Mahy's writing for Ready to Read, but her use of language to bring life to inanimate objects, and her choice of a climbing bean as a central character adds a sense of unreality to the story. This sense of unreality is even greater for children for whom the context of a household dependent on rainwater tanks would have been unfamiliar. The story opens with a general description of the setting ("Sarah and Emily lived by the sea" (22) but within the first sentence, the focus shifts to the water supply ("in a house with a green roof and a green tankstand and four green tanks.") Mahy's carefully chosen verbs make the rain sound as if it is alive (has become "a thing of wonder"): "When the rain fell on the roof, it ran along the guttering and tumbled into the green tanks. Beside the tanks, the pump lived in a little pump-house all of its own. When you turned the switch, the pump woke up and pumped the water into the house-tank" (22-23). It is also interesting to note here the use of the second person, addressing the reader directly, as an oral storyteller might.

The description of the workings of the water supply, with each action depending on the one before, mimics the structure of a traditional tale, such as "The Magpie's Tale" (another story retained from the 1963 series). In "Dry Days," the rain falls into the guttering and runs into the tanks, the pump pumps the water into the house tank, the family turn the taps on, the water comes out, they drink the water and use it for washing and watering the garden. The girls have their own gardens, and Emily has a climbing bean in her garden called Climbing George. (In "The Magpie's Tail," in order to get his tail back from an old woman, the magpie has to go from one character to another: it goes to the cow to get milk, to the paddock to get grass, to the water carrier to get water, and to the hen to get an egg.)¹³⁷

A water shortage begins to develop: "The sun shone down. It kept on shining. No water ran into the green tanks at the corner of the house" (23). This situation may have been very welcome in other circumstances but, coming after the

¹³⁷ Note that the water carrier also features in "Dry Days for Climbing George" but in this story involves a person with water tanker rather than a person carrying buckets of water.

description of why the water is needed, it suggests impending trouble. Climbing George (the climbing bean) becomes a focus of the story; the water shortage is literally a life and death situation for him. As the water shortage worsens, George becomes “very thirsty” (25). When Emily goes with her family to visit her grandparents, she describes the contrast between her grandparents’ garden and their own: “‘Grandpa puts fresh water on his garden,’ said Emily, ‘but Climbing George has to have second-hand soapy water’” (26). The situation deteriorates as time goes by: “[t]he pump began to sound very tired. It grumbled to itself in the pump-house” (27) and Emily notes that Climbing George is “very sad and thirsty” with his leaves “hanging down like tired green ears ... frightened of this dry weather” (27). At last her father arranges for the water carrier to deliver some water. Mahy contrasts the sound of the pump on the water tanker with that of the struggling pump-house: “It had a pump of its own that spoke in a loud voice. The water made a great rushing sound as it was pumped into the green tanks” (29). Ironically, as soon as Emily sets off to “give Climbing George the good news” (30) “the sky growled at them. Thunder! A spot of water fell on Sarah’s hand. Two spots fell on Emily’s face” (30) and the story ends with Climbing George holding up his leaves to the rain.

While adding to the variety of lifestyles and circumstances portrayed within the 1980s series, this story also exemplifies Mahy’s belief in “the ordinary/ miraculous double nature of things,” in this case, of sunshine and rain. While sunshine, is generally thought of as being a good thing, and conversely, rain, because of its constraining effect on outside activities, as “bad,” this story inverts these ideas. It gently prompts readers to consider (or imagine) the double, potentially dangerous, nature of the sun, and the life-giving nature of rain.

In “Washing Lines” (*Night is a Blanket*) Mahy again explores the capacity of “any commonplace object ... to become a thing of wonder” and as a conduit towards different ways of thinking about life. Mary is tired of seeing her mother’s washing line “always loaded with nappies” (12) in contrast to their neighbours’ washing lines, which are covered with colourful clothes. She asks her mother to wash her red dress “so that people can see we’ve got pretty clothes, too” (12), but Mum, not unreasonably, refuses to wash clothes that are not dirty.

“One special Saturday,” Mary is walking back home after visiting her aunt. As she passes each neighbour’s house, they wish her happy birthday and give her a small gift, but Mary is mystified as to how everyone knows it is her birthday. Finally, Julia Jones tells Mary to look at her own washing line. Mary discovers that her mother has pinned a coloured letter to every nappy, spelling out “HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARY.” Mahy adds a “magic” touch through her implicit personification of the washing line: “‘Happy Birthday, Mary!’ said the washing line” (16) and “Outside, the happy birthday washing waved in the breeze, saying ‘Happy Birthday, Mary!’ to the whole street” (18), making it seem as if the washing line itself has come alive and is talking to Mary.

Mary’s subsequent description of their washing as “the best in the street” (18) suggests that Mary now sees the nappies (and her life) in a new light. In addition to engaging the reader with its embedded mystery about how the neighbours know about Mary’s birthday, this story evokes a sense of community and friendship within a small town. It implies, through Mary’s interactions with her neighbours, her realisation of her place as part of this wider community.

Mahy uses a mystery format again in “Good Knee for a Cat” to entice the reader into the story, and then to consider what life might be like in a different set of circumstances. The story begins with the old cat not being able to find a knee to sit on because everyone is busy tidying up (in particular, picking things up off the floor). Mahy reveals that everyone is tidying up because Ann is coming, but does not provide any further information. When Ann arrives, the illustration on page thirty-one shows that she is in a wheelchair. The wheelchair is only mentioned twice in the text, the first time in the sentence: “Peter pushed Ann’s wheelchair along the path and into the house” (31). It is left for the reader to infer that this is why everyone has been picking things up off the floor, and possibly, to anticipate that Ann’s may be the “good knee” that the cat has been looking for. Illustrations on pages thirty-two and thirty-three, of the cat and Ann looking at each other, suggest that they themselves are working this out (see Figure 9.4). The story ends with an insight into the cat’s thinking (and the second mention of the wheelchair): “Most knees come and go,” thought the old cat, “but a wheelchair knee is a treat for a cat” (36). This story invites readers to consider

the events from three different perspectives: that of the children getting ready for the visitors, Ann herself, and the cat.

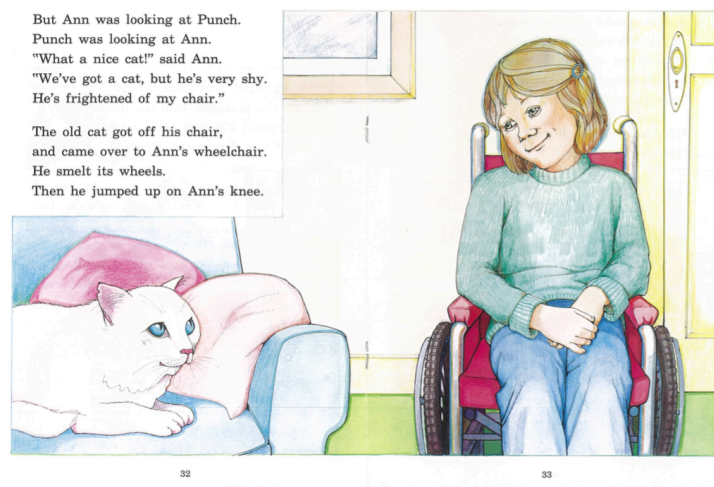


Figure 9.4. "Good Knee for a Cat" (32-33).

In "Brrrm! Brrrm!," Mahy again explores the "double nature" of things, in this case, the different ways of thinking about life in the countryside and the city. In this modern-day version of *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*, Mahy creates patterns with language that humorously contrast two points of view. The humour arises from the use of the very same words by both Emily's mother and Aunty, the former to explain why she dislikes the city and the latter why she likes it:

"Poor Auntie Annie," said Mum.
Her house is by the main road.
Trucks go up and down
outside her window.
Motorbikes zoom past her door.
Vans hoot!
Cars toot!
Buses bumble along.
What a rattle!
What a rumble!
All day long!" (7)

The text in this story is set out as short lines (as shown here), creating, along with the rhyme, alliteration, imagery, and onomatopoeia, the effect of a poem. A

few pages later, the list is repeated, slightly modified to fit the syntax, but this time it is in the narrator's voice rather than that of Emily's mother, so that the text tacitly supports her viewpoint:

As they talked,
trucks went up and down
the busy road.
Motorbikes zoomed past.
Vans hooted.
Cars tooted.
Buses bumbled along.
Poor Auntie Annie!
What a rattle! What a rumble!
All day long! (10)

When Emily takes pity on her aunt and invites her to come and visit them on the farm, Auntie uses many of the same words to express a very different viewpoint:

"I like it here by my busy road.
There is so much going on.
Trucks go up and down.
Motorbikes zoom past.
Vans hoot.
Cars toot.

I can see people coming.
I can see people going.
A farm would be too quiet for me.
I like to see what's going on in town.
I *do* like living by the main road,
with its rattle and its rumble ...
all day long." (12-13)

The accompanying illustrations show a cross-section of Auntie's house with the characters looking out at the view that she is describing. A passenger in one of the passing vehicles appears to be waving to her, and two people are walking past her house, holding hands. Auntie is shown to be part of a community. This

contrasts with the story's opening illustration, which shows a panoramic view of the countryside with Emily and her mum waiting to catch a bus to town. Apart from the bus (and a glimpse of a tractor in a nearby shed), there are no other vehicles (or people) in sight.

What makes this story even more interesting is that the story ends with Auntie's words. The expressions on the faces of Emily and Mum show that they are bemused by this totally unexpected viewpoint. The reader is left to imagine the responses of Emily and her mum to an opinion that is so different to theirs, and indeed to consider what their own opinion might be – to exercise “flexibility of mind.”

The magic of simple words

In “One great frolic with words” Mahy noted that she had become “increasingly interested in writing stories with simple words” that “tell well aloud” (5). Perhaps this was partly in response to the school reading books, including the Ready to Read books, that her daughter Bridget, six years old at the time, was bringing home. Even with “simple words,” Mahy is able to create ambiguity to intrigue and delight readers, and to suggest the wonder of “any commonplace object.” We have seen this in her use of the word “said” in relation to the washing line in the story “Washing Lines,” making it appear as if the washing line might be actually talking. There is a similar instance in “Giant Soup” with Mahy's use of the word “sneakers”: “He [the giant] put on his giant sneakers and ran quietly out into the world” (45), which lends itself to several possible interpretations. The sneakers are “giant” sneakers because they belong to a giant *and* because they are big; the fact that they are big reminds the reader that the giant is big (and dangerous), especially now that he is going out into the world in search of a boy for his soup. They are “sneakers” because that is a name for running shoes *and* because the giant needs to “sneak,” to go “quietly,” if he is to be able to catch a boy.

Other examples include Mahy's carefully chosen anthropomorphising verbs, which add a sense of magic to “Dry Days for Climbing George,” seeming to suggest that the water supply system is alive. Mahy creates a similar effect in *The Crocodile's Christmas Jandals*, describing the tide as having “stolen” the jandal

and having the crocodile talk to the sea: “‘You’ve brought me the wrong one! said the crocodile crossly to the waves. The waves just rustled on the sand and said nothing” (6). Later, when the crocodile has found a girl wearing his missing jandal, he again refers to the sea as a person, telling her that the sea “stole them and swapped them over” (11).

In addition to intriguing the reader with such ambiguities, Mahy makes full use of patterns and rhythms of language to “charm” and sweep readers along. As already noted in relation to Cowley, Frye has observed how language imbued with “music, sound and rhythm” (123) lulls or hypnotises the reader, overwhelming “sense by sound” (124). This mesmerising effect is evident in “Dry Days for Climbing George,” where Mahy uses “simple words” to convey very quickly the progression of the drought, emphasised in the book by its layout on separate lines:

The sun went on shining.
No black clouds!
No grey clouds!
No white clouds!
No rain!
Nothing but blue sky! (24)

The language follows a pattern from dark to lighter clouds, conveying the impression of the family desperately searching for signs of rain. The short repetitive phrases also create the effect of a charm or a spell (although here, the charm is proving ineffective).

Mahy wrote only two stories for readers at the earliest level of the series, *Fantail, Fantail* and *Going to the Beach*.¹³⁸ *Fantail, Fantail* has only sixty-seven words, but is an intriguing mix of story, poem, and conversation, centred on the idea of what fantails like to eat. The fantail itself, with its spectacular tail feathers, is a “thing of wonder,” and almost every aspect of this book invites questions and

¹³⁸ *Going to the Beach* has only thirty words in total (“Up, up, up. Out, out, out” and so on). Although very entertaining, the storyline is heavily reliant on humorous illustrations by Dick Frizzell.

ideas, with many gaps for the reader to fill. This is a rhythmic, rhyming, repetitive text in a dialogic format, similar in style to Bill Martin's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?* It is a "conversation" between an unidentified human (a hand is the only aspect shown in the illustrations) who offers food to the fantail, and the fantail's rejection of it. Although the words seem simple: "'Fantail, Fantail, have some peas.' 'No, no, no. I don't like peas'" (4-5) and so on, it is unclear who (if anyone) is actually "talking." We have seen examples of similar ambiguities in "Washing Lines," where it seems as if the washing line is talking, and "Dry Days for Climbing George," where the rainwater system seems to be alive. Yet the hypnotic, chanting rhythm and the humour in the incongruous offerings (cheese, peas, pie) has the effect of drawing the reader in. *Fantail, Fantail* remains to this day one of the most popular texts in the Ready to Read series, perfectly exemplifying Mahy's conception of the possibility of "first readers as potential literature."

Chapter Ten

The portrayal of a child's "own world" in the 1980s materials

In addition to producing materials with "charm, magic, impact, and appeal," the 1980s series developers aspired to help children "develop a deeper understanding of him/herself, or his/her family, or human or natural behaviour or his own world" (NAC 1980). These aims align with the conviction of Bettelheim and Zelan that:

What are needed are beginning texts that fascinate children, and convince them reading both is delightful and helps one to gain a better understanding of oneself and others – in short, of the world we live in, and of how to live in it. (263)

The interpretation of the term "own world" had changed from that in 1963 to encompass not only the world of New Zealand (settings and the real-life experiences of New Zealand children), but also the psychological worlds of children, the "inner landscape of a personality" (Mahy "One great frolic" 4). This suggests a growing recognition of the psychological impact of reading. As described in Chapter Six, in the 1970s, a great deal of research (some of it involving the Ready to Read materials) had been carried out into the influence of educational materials on children's conceptions of self. It also reflects a theory of reader response articulated by Brian Sutton-Smith in 1950 (well before the more widely published observations of Iser, Rosenblatt, Meek, and Chambers referred to in earlier chapters). Sutton-Smith, as described in Chapter Five, was a New Zealand teacher who had created a storm of criticism when his realistic stories of a gang of young boys were published in the 1949 *School Journal*. The stories were later published as a book, *Our Street* (1950) with an author's note. In this note, Sutton-Smith describes reading as

a sort of silent conversation which goes on all the time – the silent conversation of literature, in which the author and the reader exchange their feelings and agree and disagree about the book in particular and about life in general. If the book is a 'realistic' one, as this book is supposed to be, then sometimes the author will have things in his book which will make the reader want to say: 'I've felt just like that myself.' In other

words, a book – particularly a realistic one – can enlarge the reader's understanding and control of himself by putting into words experiences and feelings which he had not previously been aware he had experienced. (17)

While Sutton-Smith is referring here to stories for older readers than those in *Ready to Read*, his idea of learning about oneself through reading about the experiences of others is central to the 1980s materials.

A challenge for the series developers was to accurately convey the diversity of children's experiences and lifestyles in contrast to the relatively homogeneous view within the 1963 series. The guiding principles for the 1980s materials, as published in *Reading in Junior Classes*, state that "a series developed for a national education system should have an overall balance that reflects the diversity of make-up and experience to be found in the society the system serves" and should present material "close to the interests and experience of young children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, home circumstances, and locations" (85). These principles, however, have inherent challenges in that portraying the diversity of children's experiences means that, for each individual child, much of what they are reading might be *less* familiar (or, at least, less likely to be part of their direct experience). This paradox seems to have been acknowledged by the series developers, and they approached it in several ways. One way was to position the materials as "a flexible resource" from which teachers could "select and present books according to the interests, needs, and abilities of the children" (*Reading in Junior Classes* 86). Another way was to encourage teachers to use the shared reading approach before using the books for guided reading so that they could provide more support for unfamiliar content. A third way was to embrace a wider concept of children as readers – to think of reading as a way to build awareness of the lives of others, and for children to consider aspects of their own lives from new perspectives.

Despite their weighty ideological aims, the 1980s materials are in fact notable for their light-hearted humour and for their reflection of aspects of popular New Zealand culture. Increased access to television (introduced to New Zealand in 1960) meant that readers of the 1980s materials were more likely to be aware of

lives that were different from their own, as well as of some commonalities of New Zealand life. Dunleavy (2014) describes television as becoming “a hugely important medium for New Zealanders, providing news, information and entertainment – as well as a window on local culture and life.” In addition to programmes designed for children, such as *Play School* (from 1972) and *Spot On* (1974-1989), programmes such as *Top Town* (1976-1990), *Country Calendar* (from 1966), and *A Dog's Show* (1977-1992) brought images of small-town and rural New Zealand into children's living rooms.

This chapter explores how the 1980s materials enacted the ideological aim not only of portraying New Zealand children's own worlds but of attempting to broaden children's thinking about themselves and others. I follow this in Chapter Eleven with a closer look at the development of biculturalism and the portrayal of the worlds of Māori children over the first twenty-five years of the Ready to Read series.

Natural language

The principle of natural language, “language New Zealand children would naturally experience in conversation and in the course of having stories read to them” (Leckie 39) continued to underpin the series though it was enacted differently over time. By the 1980s, the idea that reading materials should use natural language, novel in 1963, had become the norm for New Zealand teachers, and expectations had changed about the sorts of vocabulary that children could manage and, in fact, might expect to see. The 1963 vocabulary list was dispensed with, and criteria in regard to language use instead focused more on conveying authenticity, such as whether the dialogue sounded natural, and if the language suited the theme and the characters.

While the dialogue in the 1963 materials had been a great deal more natural than in the *Janet and John* books, the use of the terms “Mother” and “Father” rather than “Mum” and “Dad” (and the infrequent use of contractions) had meant that, often, the dialogue still sounded quite formal. The “de-formalisation” of language in the 1980s materials is clear in the following comparisons of versions of stories that were retained from the 1963 series, two of which also feature in Chapter Seven.

Extracts from 1963 stories*Saturday Morning* (n.p.)

"I will hose the car today,"
said Father.

"Jenny Comes to School," *The Hungry Lambs* (25)

"Come to school again
when you are five,"
said the teacher.

"And do not come
in a pink petticoat,"
said Patrick.

"Timothy Gets Ready," *The Hungry Lambs*
(37)

They came to the hospital.

"Where is Mother?" said Timothy.

"I will get her," said Father,
and away he went.

"Here is Mother!" shouted Timothy.

"Here are Mother
and the baby!" shouted Susan.

Extracts from 1980s stories*Saturday Morning* (1983 3)

"I'm going to clean the car
this morning," said Mum.

"Jenny Comes to School," *The Big Bed*
(1984 13)

"Come to school again
when you are five, Jenny,"
said the teacher.

"And don't come
in your petticoat," said Patrick.

"The Flood," *The Big Bed* (1984 19-20)

They came to the hospital.

"Where's Mum?" asked Mere.

"We'll go and get her," said Dad.

"There's Mum!" shouted Hone.

"And the baby!" shouted Mere.

The inclusion of colloquial language, such as, "hey," "you kids," "skinny," "cheeky," "junk," "goody," "tig" (meaning to tag a player in a game of chasing), "run like mad," "gosh," "make a fuss," "oh, boy!," "see you later," and "oops!" provides further evidence of the commitment to showing (and valuing) the reality of children's informal spoken language. The materials also include playground chants, and an explanation of how to play a playground game, "Farmer, Farmer, may we cross your river?"

The informality in language style, however, was not always well received. There was, for example, a mixed response to the style of the dialogue in the story “Uncle Joe” when it was trialled.¹³⁹ In this story, three children describe their uncle in very frank and personal terms: “Uncle Joe has a big, fat belly. He’s so fat we can’t put our arms around him” (14). While some applauded the story’s use of colloquial language, the New Zealand Parent Teacher Association stated that they “didn’t like anything about the story,” and hoped that “the words used will not be taught to young children as being acceptable language.”¹⁴⁰

New Zealand words

As in the 1963 series, there are some words in the 1980s materials that are unique to New Zealand, such as “hokey pokey ice cream,” “jandals” (summer footwear known as “flip flops” or “thongs” outside of New Zealand), “Plunket nurse” (Plunket being a partially Government-funded New Zealand nursing service specialising in the care of young children), and several Māori words, including names of human and mythical characters, and of animals, plants, and objects (such as “Tuatara,” “pohutukawa,” “rimu,” “puha,” “ngaio,” “whare,” “taha”).¹⁴¹ A further intriguing example is the word “horrapotchkkin,” invented by Margaret Mahy expressly for the Ready to Read series. This word features in two of her stories, “Horrapotchkkin!” (in the miscellany of the same name), and in *The Crocodile’s Christmas Jandals*. Although “horrapotchkkin” does not have any intrinsic New Zealand associations, the very existence of this word within the series is like a “special secret” among Ready to Read readers.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ See Chapter Eleven for further discussion of this story.

¹⁴⁰ This feedback is included in a letter from the NZPTA to the Editorial Committee in December 1982.

¹⁴¹ Examples of words from other languages are reproduced here as they appeared when originally published, that is, without macrons or other diacritical marks. These were added in later reprints.

¹⁴² The meaning of this word has clearly mystified people unfamiliar with the series. For example, see “Can you please teach me the word ‘Horrapotchkkin!’ ?”

<https://nz.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20060812002811AAhF5nU>

Other words strongly associated with New Zealand, some of which also appear in the 1963 series, include: “creek,” “paddock,” “lamb,” “school bus,” “football” (meaning rugby), “pants” (meaning trousers), “fantail,” “gull,” “gumboots,” “possum,” and “barbecue.” Often the New Zealand connotations are an outcome of the cumulative effect of words, settings, and illustrations. In *The Biggest Cake in the World* (by Joy Cowley, illustrated by Diane Perham), for example, the illustrations and vocabulary such as “a tank full of milk,” “trailer,” “tractor,” and “chainsaw” evoke a New Zealand farming lifestyle.

Words from languages other than English

For the first time, the series incorporated words from Pacific languages. Two key examples are “Pita’s Birthday” (by Joy Cowley) in the miscellany *Pita’s Birthday*, which is accompanied by photographs of Pita’s birthday cards showing birthday greetings in several Pacific languages (see Figure 10.1), and a non-fiction article entitled “The Umu” (*Crinkum-Crankum*).¹⁴³



Figure 10.1. “Pita’s Birthday Cards” in several Pacific languages (28-29).

The most uniquely New Zealand aspect of vocabulary in the 1980s materials, however, is in the use of Māori language. The revised series included three bilingual texts: one a song “E Ko, E Ko” (“Morning Chorus”) by Sydney (Hirini) Melbourne within the miscellany *Night is a Blanket*, and two concertina books with Māori on one side and English on the other for shared reading, as shown in Figure 10.2. Both of the concertina books are dialogic texts, involving questions

¹⁴³ “The Umu” is by Fran and Niki Hunia with photographs by Ans Westra.

and answers, which build up to a dramatic climax. *Taniwha, Taniwha* (the same title for both the English and Māori versions) is based on the playground game *What's the Time Mr Wolf?*, and *Kei hea te Taniwha?/Where is the Taniwha?* is based on a similar idea, with children asking questions and the taniwha coming closer and closer (“Where’s the taniwha? He’s in the river. Where’s the taniwha? He’s in the canoe ... Where’s the taniwha? He’s behind you! Run!”)



Figure 10.2. *Kei hea te Taniwha?/ Where is the Taniwha?* and *Taniwha, Taniwha*.

Māori language also features in some of the English-language texts, usually within dialogue. It is strongly supported by context and illustrations, and, often, by the repetition of the phrase in English. “The Story of Rona,” a retelling of the Māori myth, illustrates this approach. In the myth, Rona gets taken up into the sky by Marama (the moon) as punishment for being disrespectful. When Rona’s children call out, “E Rona! He wai!” their words are followed by the equivalent phrase in English: “Bring us some water” (22). Later in the story, when Marama has taken Rona into the sky, her children search for her and ask, “Kei hea koe?” (meaning “Where are you?”) As well as being very clear from the context, this question uses the same (by now, familiar) structure as the bilingual text *Kei hea te Taniwha?* In answer, Rona calls out, “Titiro mai” (meaning “look at me”), again, with the context well supported by the following sentences in English: “‘I’m up here with Marama.’ The children looked up” (26), and also by the fact that “Titiro mai” was (and is) a phrase commonly used in classrooms. The illustrations, too, provide a high level of support for the meaning.

“The Scary Ghosts” (*Crinkum-Crankum*), a play set at school, also incorporates words and phrases likely to have been in common use in classrooms. The following extract where Mr Hemi, the principal, greets the class teacher and the children seems to assume readers’ familiarity with the distinction between the singular and plural forms of address (“tēnā koe” and “tēnā koutou”):

MR HEMI. Tena koe, Mrs Roberts.

Tena koutou, tamariki ma.

MRS ROBERTS. Tena koe, Mr Hemi.

CHILDREN. Tena koe, Mr Hemi. (58)

In a further example, in “Uamairangi” (*Giant Soup*), Aunty Mei calls the family to the table with the words, “Haere mai ki te kai” (60). Not only do such examples recognise and promote the use of Māori, they acknowledge bilingualism in the Māori characters. This is a significant change from the 1963 series where Māori characters speak only in English.

In addition to these examples of Māori dialogue, there are some instances of the use of Māori loan words within English-language texts. These are different from words such as “taniwha,” “tuatara,” and “pohutukawa” that have no equivalent in English. In the English-language version of *Taniwha*, *Taniwha*, the word “kai” is used instead of “dinner,” while “Rima Rakiraki” in *Pita’s Birthday* is an adapted version of the song “Five little ducks” with the numbers one to five replaced with “tahi, rua, toru, wha, rima.”

The inclusion of Māori language in the 1980s materials seems to have developed somewhat “organically” as a consequence of several overlapping factors: the 1970s Māori cultural renaissance, changes in government policy regarding biculturalism, growing awareness of Māori language and culture by non-Māori, and changes in commercial picture book publishing.¹⁴⁴ As described in Chapter Six, the 1970s and 1980s had seen increasing use of Māori language (and in one instance, Samoan language) in picture book publishing. *Crayfishing*

¹⁴⁴ In 1978, before the first of the revised Ready to Read materials were published, the School Publications Branch had begun publishing *He Purapura*, a Māori-language series for young readers.

with *Grandmother* (Bagnall and Potae 1973) has English and Māori versions of the text on each page. *The Kuia and the Spider* by Patricia Grace was published in both English (1981) and Māori (1982), as was her 1985 book, *Watercress Tuna and the Children of Champion Street*.¹⁴⁵ In these commercially published picture books, there is, in general, more support for the Māori words than in the Ready to Read materials. Most include a glossary and some also have pronunciation guides. It is interesting to note that there are no glossaries or pronunciation guides in the Ready to Read materials, perhaps indicating an assumption (or an expectation) that New Zealand teachers would have this knowledge.

“A variety of cultural backgrounds, home circumstances, and locations”

Language, however, is not the only way in which the 1980s set out to represent “a variety of cultural backgrounds, home circumstances, and locations.” Lois Thompson, Chief Editor of School Publications at the time of the revision, describes the extensive use of checklists by the editorial team, ensuring equitable coverage of such aspects as family structures, cultural diversity, and home settings.¹⁴⁶ I begin this section with a discussion of the representation of Māori and Pacific cultures within the revised series.

In addition to “Rona and the Moon” (mentioned previously), the 1980s materials include the Māori myth, *Maui and the Sun* (illustrated by renowned Māori artist Cliff Whiting) and two Pacific tales, “The Biggest Canoe,” and “Why the Moon has Shadows on her Face.”¹⁴⁷ While, from a twenty-first century perspective, it is problematic that almost all of the stories with Māori or Pacific

¹⁴⁵ As discussed in Chapter Six, *Watercress Tuna* was also published in a Samoan language version.

¹⁴⁶ Personal communication.

¹⁴⁷ *Maui and the Sun* is retold by June Melser. King (2003) notes that this myth is derived from a wider Polynesian mythology (20). “The Story of Rona” is retold by Fran Hunia, illustrated by Murray Grimsdale; “The Biggest Canoe” is retold by Barbara Beveridge, illustrated by Diane Perham; and “Why the Moon has Shadows on her Face” is retold by Margaret Mooney, illustrated by Elspeth Williamson.

content were written by Pākehā writers and illustrated by Pākehā artists, the inclusion of Māori and Pacific traditional tales is a significant change from the focus on European tales in the 1963 series.¹⁴⁸

Several of the texts with contemporary settings have Māori protagonists, and in contrast to Wiri in the 1963 stories, they are all portrayed in positive and unambiguous ways. In *I Can Read* (by Margaret Malcolm) a young Māori girl triumphantly lists all the people she can read to, and in *Matthew Likes to Read* (by Jan Grainger) a Māori boy describes his experiences of reading informational material (signs, instructions, newspapers, a shopping list, and so on). *Paru has a Bath* (by Fran Hunia) features two children, Hana and Te Popo, chasing their dog Paru through the bush near their house as Paru (like Harry, the dirty dog) tries to avoid having a bath. In *Nana's in the Plum Tree* (by Jan Cartwright) Hine describes her grandmother collecting honey from her backyard beehives, and in "Uamairangi" (*Giant Soup*) by Katarina Mataira, a young boy, the title character, after trying unsuccessfully to find his favourite foods in the kitchen at home, discovers them all, including "a big, steaming hot pot of pork bones and puha" (63) when his family go to Auntie Mei's house for a family dinner.¹⁴⁹ The illustrations, character names, and inclusion of Māori words mark these texts as being about Māori families. Some aspects, such as references to extended family and living close to nature (a bush setting in *Paru has a Bath*; backyard beehives in *Nana's in the Plum Tree*) are typical of, but not exclusive to, Māori lifestyles. I discuss the portrayals of Māori characters further in Chapter Eleven.

Pacific cultures, too, are represented, although this representation is somewhat undermined by the fact that there is little differentiation between the Pacific cultures portrayed. *Fasi Sings and Fasi's Fish* (by Cowley) features attendance at church, a significant aspect of all Pacific cultures. As mentioned previously, photographs of birthday cards with birthday greetings in Pacific languages accompany the story "Pita's Birthday." "Pigeons" (*The Big Bed*) by Cowley, tells the story of John who feeds the pigeons on his way to school but realises, too late, that he has nothing left for lunch. His teacher, Mrs Fa'asau

¹⁴⁸ The 1963 series also included one Japanese tale, "The Sticky Sticky Pine."

¹⁴⁹ Puha is a New Zealand native plant, similar to watercress, also known as rauriki.

cheers him up by sharing her lunch with him. Although the storyline is not culturally specific, the teacher's name, the illustrations (by Murray Grimsdale) and, possibly the focus on sharing food, mark this as a Pacific story. "The Umu" is a non-fiction article in which a girl describes the process of preparing an umu (a traditional way of cooking food in an earth oven) at their home. Other Pacific pieces include a standalone illustration by Triska Blumenfeld, entitled "Evening in a Samoan Village" (*Night is a Blanket*), and a fantasy story, "The Musical Instruments Argue" by Fijian writer, Susana Tuisawau, although her connection to Fiji is not stated.

Home circumstances

Whereas most of the 1963 stories clearly involve Mother, Father, and at least two children, there is more variety, or at least, less specificity in the composition of families within the 1980s materials. Many of the stories, including those mentioned above, show children interacting with members of their extended family (grandparents, aunts, or uncles), while some stories focus on just one or two family members, often mother and child, leaving the overall family structure ambiguous.¹⁵⁰ There are, however, some stories by Mahy that *do* suggest the absence of a father. One would assume in *Mrs Bubble's Baby*, that if there were a Mr Bubble in residence, his reaction to the dramatic events in the story would be included. In "Giant Soup," the giant is clearly left alone with no paternal support when his mother goes on holiday, and there is no father in evidence when Simon is served up for dinner in "Horrapotchkin!" While the absence of fathers from some of the 1980s stories does not necessarily imply their absence from families, this is still a significant difference from the almost ubiquitous presence of Mother and Father in the 1963 family stories. The establishment of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1974 had made it easier for women to manage as single parent families, and helped to raise social awareness of differences in family circumstances.

Perhaps because of the greater variety in story styles and illustrations, there is less sense of a typical New Zealand home setting than in the 1963 series. The

¹⁵⁰ In the 1963 series, *Grandma Comes to Stay* is the only story that includes any members beyond the nuclear family.

one feature that does seem to characterise homes shown in the 1980s illustrations is informality (sometimes untidiness) when compared with the homes in the 1963 materials. (I have referred to this in Chapter Seven in regard to “The Flood.” “Good Knee for a Cat,” discussed below, provides a further example.) There are, however, some stories in which home settings are central to the storyline and seem intended to draw attention to different sorts of New Zealand lifestyles. Mahy’s “Brrrm! Brrrm!” (*Giant Soup*) explores differences in opinions about country life and city life, also an underlying theme in “Mark and the Salty Sky” (*Night is a Blanket*) by Catherine Duthie. Mahy’s story “Dry Days for Climbing George” (*Dog Talk*) is set in a rural area where houses rely on rain-water tanks for their supply, and explores the effect on a family (and on Climbing George, a bean plant) when there is no rain.

Some stories introduce the idea of what life might be like for children with disabilities. Mahy’s “Good Knee for a Cat” (also discussed in Chapter Nine) offers children an intriguing perspective on an otherwise unremarkable home setting. The children in the story are told that they have to pick everything up off the floor because Ann is coming to visit. Eventually the reader discovers that the reason for this is that Ann is in a wheelchair. In *Words* (by Cowley), the main character, Ron, has an intellectual disability that affects his speech; in *Paul* (by Glenda Laurence) the title character requires the support of a walking frame.

There is also a change in the representation of financial circumstances. While the 1963 series portrays families that are smartly dressed, own cars, and receive store-bought presents, the 1980s materials are less consumer-focused. Several stories, particularly those by Mahy and Cowley, portray families who seem in modest financial circumstances.¹⁵¹ In Mahy’s *The Crocodile in the Garden*, when the crocodile discovers that the family’s neighbour, Mr Hedgerow, has “a new mower, a new spade and a new rake,” the boy narrator states that the crocodile “was most interested. He loved new things and most of our things were old” (2). In “Washing Lines” there is no big birthday party for Mary, and when her

¹⁵¹ Kathryn Walls explores this aspect of Mahy’s writing for young adults in her chapter “Money” in *A Made-Up Place* (2011), particularly in regard to the circumstances of Laura Chant and her mother in *The Changeover* (1984).

neighbours give her gifts, they are small, inexpensive items (a bunch of flowers, a peppermint stick, a homemade shirt). In other Mahy stories, the items that characters treasure are also modest (jandals, stories, and toothbrushes). In *Fasi Sings and Fasi's Fish*, when Fasi barks at a fish Pita has caught, Pita says, "It's got good meat in it" (9) implying that he has caught the fish with the intention of eating it. Murray Grimsdale's illustrations for "Pigeons" show John going to school with no shoes. In all the photographs of school scenes in the 1980s materials, the children are dressed casually and some have bare feet.

The only example of family extravagance is in Mahy's fantasy story "Horrapotchkin!" where Rosemary Turner's illustrations show the lion family living in almost palatial splendour, playing on the association of lions with kings. The lion's mother wears pearls and a fur stole (also a humorous play on the idea of lions as predators) and can afford to buy more than twenty-five different types of ice cream.

Locations

The desire to help a child "develop a better understanding of him/herself, or his/her family, or human or natural behaviour, or his own world" is further demonstrated by the inclusion of settings that move beyond home and school into the local neighbourhood and wider community. *The Smile* (Cowley) follows the path of a smile from home, where Baby gives it to Mum who gives it to Dad, and so on (to the garage man, the post woman, the teacher) and, finally, to the school children who "kept it all day" (8). In a similar way, the settings in Cowley's poem *The Wild Wet Wellington Wind* move from home, describing the slapping of washing on the clothesline, into the neighbourhood with leaves and hats blowing around, then out into Wellington harbour ("The breakers crash [...] The tugboats splash), and ends with the family outside ("Our family is out [...] We scurry and shout") enjoying the wild wet Wellington wind. The outside covers of the book form a continuous illustration of the wild harbour and houses on the hills conveying a sense both of the wider landscape, and of the families living within it (see Figure 10.3).

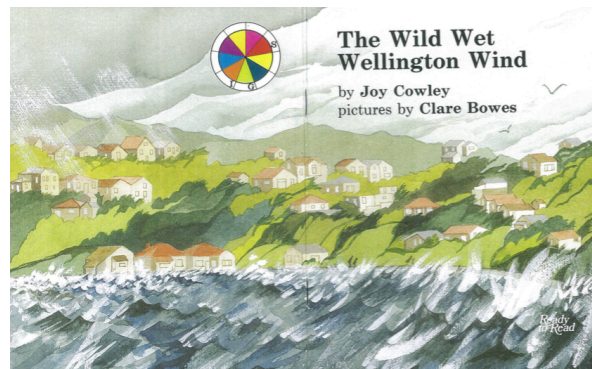


Figure 10.3. The back and front covers of *The Wild Wet Wellington Wind*.

In “Three Spiky Balls by Patricia Johnson (*Dog Talk*), David and his neighbour, Mrs Millar, work together to care for three hedgehogs. Interactions with neighbours are central to Mahy’s story “Washing Lines,” and in her wild crocodile stories, the boy and the crocodile interact (though not always positively) with many people in their local community including neighbours, librarians, and disgruntled shoppers and shopkeepers.

The 1980s materials retain a significant focus on the natural landscape of New Zealand, but with a more straightforward approach than in the 1963 series. Rather than including detailed descriptions or embedding “lessons” within stories, explicit information is provided through non-fiction (sometimes in the form of photographs rather than text) and poetry. Some pieces, such as *Blackbird’s Nest*, “Dandelion Clock” (*Pita’s Birthday*), “Flies Taste with their Legs” (*Giant Soup*), “Ducks are Waterproof” (*Crinkum-Crankum*), and “The Poppy” (*Dog Talk*) include content that is not specific to New Zealand.

Non-fiction texts present students with opportunities to “develop a better understanding” both of the natural world, and of the world of work. A photographic article, “One Thursday Morning” (*Giant Soup*) shows the work of a traffic officer. “Crossing Water” (*Horrapapotchkin!*) is a set of themed photographs (without text) showing aspects of contemporary and historical New Zealand life: shepherds mustering sheep, Māori paddling a waka, an interisland ferry, a towering rail bridge. The inclusion of wordless texts suggests an intention to encourage children to draw on their own experiences and prior knowledge to construct their own verbal texts.

New Zealand bush and beach settings feature in several stories but more as a background to events than as an aspect of particular significance. In *Paru has a Bath*, Paru the dog leads Hana and Te Popo on a wild chase into the bush “under the house, around the tree, through the gate, up the hill, down the hill, past the shed, and along the zigzag track to the creek” (8-9) but the focus of the story is the dog’s determination to avoid having a bath. In *Rain, Rain* (Cowley) the child narrators describe how they walk “up the track” and paddle “in the stream” during a family camping holiday, but the focus of the story is the contrast in how the children and their parents view the rainy weather.

While probably more a result of the freelance scripts submitted than a deliberate plan, it is interesting to note that, in contrast to the backdrop of summer and sunshine in the 1963 stories, the 1980s materials also feature the wind (*The Wind* and *The Wild Wet Wellington Wind*), the rain (as mentioned previously), and frost. In *The Rescue*, Ann, who has missed the school bus, decides to cut across the paddocks to get to school, then finds and rescues a stranded lamb.¹⁵² The photographs and descriptions such as “The grass was white and stiff with frost. As Ann ran, the grass crunched beneath her feet” (4) strongly evoke the experience of a frosty, winter morning in rural New Zealand.

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Sunny weather also features, as does the beach. Mahy’s fantasy story *The Crocodile’s Christmas Jandals* portrays a typical New Zealand experience: a summer Christmas, jandals, the beach, and a family barbecue, albeit through a reptilian lens (see Figure 10.4).

¹⁵² *The Wind* is by Barbara Hill, and *The Rescue* is by Rae Collins.

¹⁵³ The reader does, however, need to suspend their disbelief in regard to the improbability of a photographer happening to be on hand to capture the unfolding events.

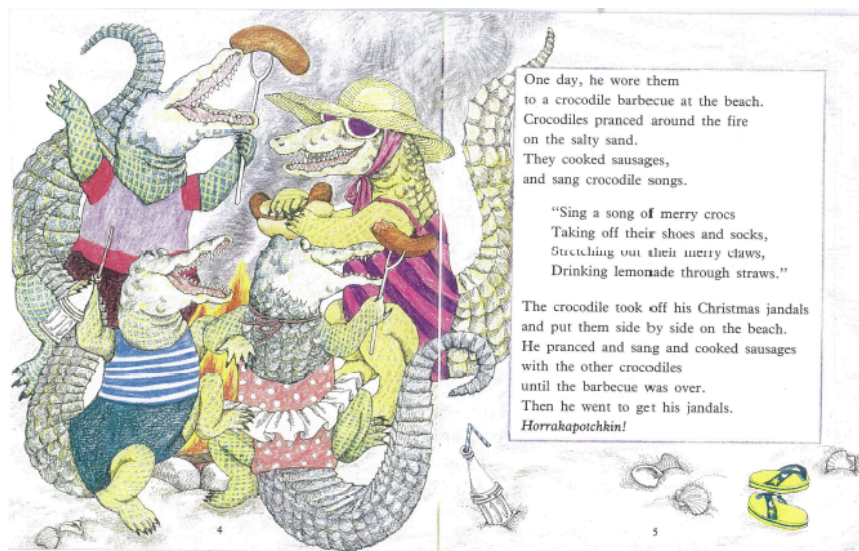


Figure 10.4. *The Crocodile's Christmas Jandals* (4-5).

The idea (rather than the actuality) of the beach underpins two other stories. Mahy's *Going to the Beach* (illustrated by Dick Frizzell) is a very simple story where a family set off for the beach but are delayed by a puncture. In Cowley's book *Words* (illustrated by Lesley Moyes), Ron struggles with speech. He wants to go to the beach, but first he has to persuade his parents. The only visual representation of the beach in this story is in a small thought bubble, and a picture in a book Ron shows his parents. The story ends before the actual beach trip takes place. These two stories appear to rely on a shared understanding by readers of the concept of "the beach," an interesting contrast to the approach in the 1963 story "Penguin Island" where, as mentioned in previous chapters, the beach setting and lifestyle is described in great detail.¹⁵⁴

Portrayal of children

I describe in Chapter Five how the child characters in the 1963 materials, although lively and capable, are constrained by gender stereotyping, and are, to a

¹⁵⁴ As an island nation, proximity to the beach is perhaps one of the defining characteristics of New Zealand life. In 2006, Statistics New Zealand reported that 75 per cent of New Zealanders were living within ten kilometres of a beach and 96.6 per cent within fifty kilometres. See "Stats NZ: Are New Zealanders living closer to the coast?" http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/Migration/internal-migration/are-nzs-living-closer-to-coast.aspx.

large extent, controlled by adults. There is a dramatic change in both of these aspects in the 1980s materials. This reflects changes in social attitudes, and in particular, growing concerns about the impact on children of the underpinning ideologies in educational materials. The script criteria for the revised series show the series developers' determination to "avoid condescensions, stereotyping, and inaccuracy" (Mooney 5). In this section, I discuss how this determination was enacted in the 1980s materials.

Children with agency

The 1980s materials reflect a deliberate intention to move away from the didactic, adult-controlled depiction of children in the earlier series. While a few stories revisit the theme of young children getting into predicaments, most of the characters in the stories who "misbehave" or cause problems are animals (dogs, a cat, a crocodile, a lion), or adults (witches, a ghost, a giant, Mrs Bubble, Mr Finch). Conversely, when children do find themselves in predicaments, they resolve the situation themselves. The inclusion of fantasy greatly increased the possibilities for creating stories that did not rely on incidents caused by misbehaving children (greatly reducing the risk of public approbation as in the case of the 1949 Sutton-Smith stories). In the 1980s stories, a crocodile can snap at children and have tantrums, Greedy Cat can steal food, and other animals can intimidate others (as in *I'm the King of the Mountain*) without worries about endorsing bad behaviour. Stories featuring misbehaviour by characters who are not children also removes the element of personal angst, enabling readers to consider more clearly the motivations of the characters and "gain a better understanding of oneself and others" (Bettelheim and Zelan 263).

In general, the stories with child protagonists show the children as "heroes," overcoming challenges and solving problems (not usually of their own making) without the intervention of adults. In Mahy's stories, for example, it is the boy, not the mother, who manages the crocodile, Simon who talks his way out of being dinner in "Horrapotchkin!," Jason who outwits the giant in "Giant Soup," and Rosie who works out how to get herself down from a tree in "Rosie Climbs

the Sky Tree” (*Dog Talk*). In other stories, Hana and Te Popo solve the problem of getting Paru to have a bath, and Ann singlehandedly rescues a stranded lamb.¹⁵⁵

Yet the initiative and agency of children within some stories was still considered to be a step too far by some. In 1987 *Where is Miss Pool?* was published with illustrations of graffiti on a school fence, including the statement “Miss Pool is my teacher” (shown in Figure 10.5). The Otago Education Board was sufficiently outraged by this to request that the book be withdrawn from all schools. (This was reported under the headlines “Graffiti concerns” and “Graffiti in school book” in Wellington’s *Dominion* and *Evening Post* newspapers on November 12, 1987.) The letter from the board pointed out that the word “My” implied that the graffiti must have been written by one of Miss Pool’s students, and expressed concern “over the impression that might be gained by children, especially contained in a booklet released by the Department of Education, that the writing of graffiti on school property is acceptable school behaviour.”¹⁵⁶

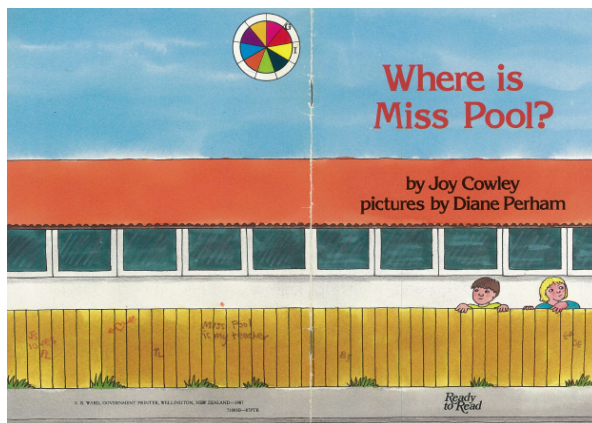


Figure 10.5. Graffiti on the fence in *Where is Miss Pool?*

¹⁵⁵ The latter story is an interesting counterpoint to the 1963 story (also called “The Rescue”) where the children are rescued by adults.

¹⁵⁶ A copy of this letter was among papers being discarded by Learning Media that I now have in my possession. The Otago Education Board were eventually successful. The book remained in the series, complete with its graffiti, for several years until the technology was available to “clean” the fence without having to completely replace the two illustrations.

In addition to stories with proactive main characters, the use of first-person child narrators in both realistic and fantasy texts conveys the agency of children. First-person narration creates a sense of immediacy and authenticity, a direct sharing of experiences with the reader. It positions the child as the holder of knowledge, describing experiences that are unique (and special) to them. The 1963 series had included one story, “A Donkey at School” (*The Donkey’s Egg*) narrated by a child. In this story, however, the child is an observer rather than a driver of events. In contrast, even in the very simple 1983 text *I Can Read*, a young girl talks proudly about her reading; in *The Hobboggit*, a child describes her imaginative play with shadows; in *Paul*, a child describes how she and her classmates help Paul, who uses a walking frame, manage at school (and how they, in turn, develop their understanding of what Paul can do); in “Uncle Joe,” the child narrators describe their relationship with their uncle; and in “The Umu,” a child shares her knowledge with the reader. As discussed in Chapter Nine, Mahy’s use of the boy to narrate the “wild” crocodile stories positions him as the one with control and insight.

A Cardboard Box, a book of plays, provides an intriguing example of children positioned at the centre of events. In this book, instead of illustrations of the events in the plays themselves, there are photographs of children making props and masks and performing the plays (see Figure 10.6). The book ends with comments from the children about their experiences: “I felt great because the fox was scared of something and I tried to show off,” “The play’s good because it’s about being brainy,” and “I liked being an elephant because that way I can show that I am someone” (22-23). The authenticity of the children’s efforts is emphasised by an acknowledgment on the final page, thanking the staff and children of Ngati Toa School for their help. This approach has the effect of making the book more about the imagination, craft skills, and insights of the child performers than about the plays themselves.

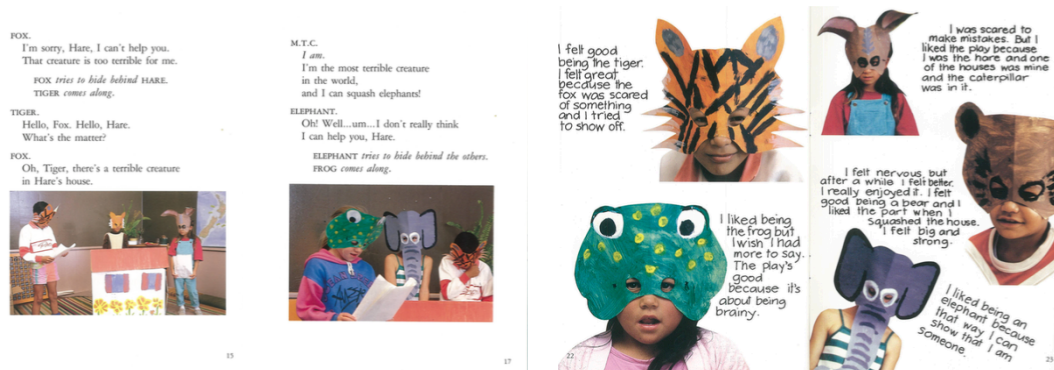


Figure 10.6. *A Cardboard Box* (15 17 22-23).

In a similar vein, children in the 1980s materials are portrayed as being confident speakers and having agency in their relationships with adults. Often this is conveyed through dialogue, which is more relaxed and informal than in the 1963 materials, where much of what the adults say is imperative and functional. The following interactions demonstrate this contrast: in *Early in the Morning* (1963) Mother says “Come to breakfast, Bill. Come to breakfast, Peter”, while in *Sam’s Mask*, by Christine Cachemaille (1983), a book at a similar level, Sam’s mother responds to a joke of Sam’s by saying “Help! ... Who’s this monster wearing Sam’s pants?” (10-11).¹⁵⁷ A similar playful incident occurs in *Matthew Likes to Read* when Matthew secretly adds ice cream to his mother’s shopping list. The final illustration shows them both enjoying the joke (see Figure 10.7).



Figure 10.7. *Matthew Likes to Read* (12).

Children as readers and writers

The portrayal of children as learners, and in particular, as readers and writers, pervades the 1980s materials, extending far beyond the school settings of the

¹⁵⁷ There is a nice resonance here with the question Mother Bear asks of Little Bear on his return from his trip to the “moon,” as discussed in Chapter Two.

earlier series. Books and reading feature in many stories: *A Crocodile in the Library* is focused on the challenge of finding just the right book for the crocodile, and *The Bubbling Crocodile* ends with the promise of a story as a reward; in “Giant Soup,” it is Jason’s reading of cookbooks that enables him to advise the giant about how to make soup (and ultimately saves him from becoming one of the ingredients). Texts that explicitly promote reading include *I Can Read* (in which the books the girl is reading are all from the revised Ready to Read series), *Matthew Likes to Read*, and the poem “Our Library” in *Pita’s Birthday*. Reading as part of everyday life feature in the illustrations for several stories, including *Saturday Morning*, “Michael is a Clown,” “The Flood,” “Uncle Joe,” and “Good Knee for a Cat.” Mrs Delicious is reading from “The Big Big Cookery Book” on the cover of *The Biggest Cake in the World*, and the inside front cover of *Crinkum-Crankum* has an illustration by Robyn Belton of a child reading to her bear with a copy of the *Giant Soup* miscellany beside her. Children’s writing features too: *Where is Miss Pool?* ends with a display of get well cards that the children have made for her, and, as mentioned previously, “Pita’s Birthday” is accompanied by a selection of handmade birthday cards.

The idea of New Zealand children as lovers of reading is emphasised by the lively design within several texts. Jill McDonald had initiated the incorporation of print into illustrations in some of the 1963 stories (“Jenny Comes to School,” “The Magpie’s Tail,” “‘Excuse me’, said the Rubber”) and this practice was greatly expanded in the 1980s. The stories abound with features such as speech bubbles, variety in print size and typeface, and words within illustrations for children to discover and enjoy. Examples include the words “LOOK OUT MUM” incorporated into the page two illustration in *Greedy Cat*, and “The Night was Dark and Stormy,” a humorous, “never-ending” story displayed as a series of repeated sentences around a castle window frame (both shown in Figure 10.8).

Figure 10.8. Examples of playful book design: *Greedy Cat* (2-3) and “The Night was Dark and Stormy” (*Night is a Blanket* 47).

Other humorous uses of print within illustrations include letters floating around in the giant’s cauldron to form the words “GIANT SOUP” (shown in Figure 9.3), Doctor Fixer’s “DEGREE IN MAGICAL MEDICINAL MUSIC” hanging on the wall (*Mrs Bubble’s Baby* 3), a sign saying “No dogs or crocodiles allowed” that hastily appears as the boy and the crocodile approach the vegetable shop (*Shopping with a Crocodile* 10),

do not always have two parents at home, men and women do housework, women as well as men do interesting things outside the home" (April 1984).

By the time of the series revision, several pieces of research into gender stereotyping within New Zealand school materials had been undertaken, and representatives of Women in Education were included on the National Advisory Committee (NAC). The degree of concern by some over potential stereotyping is demonstrated in the minutes of an NAC meeting held on February 15 1983, which include excerpts from an analysis by Women in Education of the nine books that had been published by that date. On finding that 66 percent of the total characters in the nine books were male, the representatives comment that this is "not good enough," and that females "should be represented equally." The report goes on to give a "bouquet" for *Mrs Bubble's Baby*, stating that Dr Fixit (a female doctor) "is delightful," and to express concern about "The Scary Ghosts," questioning why the teacher couldn't be male and the principal female. The report writers also express concerns that all animals (including Old Tuatara and Greedy Cat) and even the climbing bean plant in "Dry Days for Climbing George" "appear to be portrayed as males." School Publications Education Officer, Michael Keith, is recorded in the minutes, as assuring all members that all roles would be represented in proportion by the time the series was complete.¹⁵⁸

Across the series, gender-specific terms are avoided ("firemen" become "firefighters," and "policemen" become "police officers"); the traffic officer featured in "One Thursday Morning" is female; the fire fighters shown in both "*Did you say 'Fire'?*" and *The Biggest Cake in the World* include females, and in two of the stories, "A Proper Soccer Ball" (*Pita's Birthday*), by Glenda Laurence, and Mahy's *The Crocodile's Christmas Jandals*, girls get to play football.¹⁵⁹ Boys

¹⁵⁸ No changes were subsequently made to the genders of the characters mentioned here. In fact, by 1988, the proportion of male to female protagonists within the revised series remained slightly higher.

¹⁵⁹ Perhaps Mahy's inclusion of the "Girls and Boys" football team in *The Crocodile's Christmas Jandals* is a response to her comment in her 1974 article "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Stereotype?" that she could "remember some good girl footballers back in Whakatane, though they didn't make the team" (27).

are shown in nurturing roles and expressing their feelings. In “William” (*Dog Talk*) by Denise Irvine, a boy describes how he and his sister are grieving for their cat, killed in a car accident.

In her 1974 article “Who’s afraid of the big bad stereotype?” Mahy (as indicated above) had queried the gender stereotyping apparent within current instructional reading materials. She refers to the 1963 Ready to Read story *Grandma Comes to Stay* in which Grandma brings presents for the children: a doll for Sally, a fire engine for Bill, and a car for Peter.¹⁶⁰ Mahy writes:

Suppose Grandma had given all three children kites and had taken them out kite-flying on the sandhills. Kites are always enchanted things, coming alive in the wind, pulling like little dragons on their strings. The whole narrative could have had an extra element of life about it – and incidentally, would have broken free from the basic boy/girl stereotype it embodies in its present form. I’m not saying that Sally was not thrilled with her doll, but a kite would have been exciting, too, and could lead to a wilder magic (27-28).

Not surprisingly, the stories that Mahy did eventually write for the revised series are notable for their transcendence of stereotypes.

In summary

The overall representation of children in the 1980s materials is far more complex and empowering than that in 1963. Child characters are cheerful, lively, resourceful, imaginative, and independent; they are unconstrained by gender stereotypes, enthusiastic about reading and learning, articulate, and confident about interacting within a wider community. The underlying ideology evident in characterisation and choice of content is almost an exact foreshadowing of ideas about children now enshrined in curriculum documents. The current *New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) states:

Our vision is for young people: who will be creative, energetic, and enterprising [...] who will work to create an Aotearoa New

¹⁶⁰ Mahy’s daughters were born in 1961 and 1966 so by 1974, Mahy would have twice had the experience of children bringing Ready to Read books home from school.

Zealand in which Māori and Pākehā recognise each other as full Treaty partners, and in which all cultures are valued for the contributions they bring [...] who will be confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners. (Ministry of Education 8)

Cowley's Ready to Read book, *The Biggest Cake in the World*, encapsulates the approach within the 1980s series to portraying New Zealand lifestyles, cultural diversity, and the avoidance of gender stereotyping. At the same time, it delights and engages readers with its rhythmic, repetitive text, its characterisation, fantasy elements, and humorous visual elements including speech bubbles and a visual subtext involving the youngest child.¹⁶¹ In this story, Mrs Delicious sets out, with the help of three children, to make the biggest cake in the world. The exaggeration of the ingredients, the willingness of Mrs Delicious to attempt a seemingly impossible task, her practical capabilities (driving a tractor, a tanker, and a truck, and using a chainsaw) all combine to both celebrate and play with the stereotype of the New Zealand farmer. The diversity of 1980s New Zealand is represented in the final illustration (shown in Figure 10.9), which portrays people from many walks of life commenting, in many languages, about the cake. Of particular interest is the use of the Māori term “ka pai” by the Pākehā construction worker on the far right (in safety helmet and black singlet) to express his appreciation of the cake.¹⁶² This story encapsulates the observation of Bettelheim and Zelan of the need for “beginning texts that fascinate children, and convince them reading both is delightful and helps one to gain a better understanding of oneself and others” (263).

¹⁶¹ On page four, the boy is eating sugar that is dribbling out of a hole in a sugar sack. The illustration also shows a line of ants heading towards the sugar. On page five, while Mrs Delicious and the other two children are carrying towering piles of eggs, the boy is carrying a small yellow chicken; on the next page, he is sleeping, and on page seven, he is lying down with his mouth open to catch a drop from the hose that two firefighters are holding.

¹⁶² “Ka pai” means “it’s good” or “thank you”.

Chapter Eleven

Biculturalism in the Ready to Read series

As part of the canon of New Zealand children's literature, the Ready to Read materials are of particular significance because they were the first picture books for young New Zealanders that acknowledged Māori children as part of the reading audience. They showed Māori children participating successfully in a Pākehā world (though not, in the 1963 materials, a Māori world). Looked at together, the 1963 and 1980s materials provide insights into changes in social attitudes to race and into the move towards biculturalism within New Zealand.

New Zealand anthropologist Metge (1978) states that a culture "can be simply and usefully defined as 'a system of shared understandings' – understandings of what words and actions mean, of what things are really important, and of how those values should be expressed" (8). Director General of Education, W. L. (Bill) Renwick, in a speech to a reading conference in 1984, defined biculturalism (and multiculturalism) as "ways by which the members of two or more cultures can share, enjoy and value aspects of each other's culture" (3).¹⁶³ Thus, when I refer to biculturalism in this chapter, I am referring to acknowledgment and interaction between cultures, rather than just the presence of two cultures within a society.

Hayward (2012) describes New Zealand prior to the self-led Māori renaissance of the 1970s as being "unofficially monocultural."¹⁶⁴ Years of economic and educational disadvantage, and the weakening of traditional communities and culture had led many, including Māori, to believe that the best way forward for was for Māori to assimilate into a Pākehā way of life. This attitude is epitomised in the Hunn Report (1961), a review of the Department of Māori Affairs, which was to strongly influence government policy in the 1960s.

¹⁶³ Renwick's address was entitled "Bi-culturalism – and Computers too." The page references here (and later in this chapter) are to his speech notes.

¹⁶⁴ See "Whārangī 1. From bicultural to monocultural, and back."

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/mi/biculturalism/page-1>

Hunn states

Here and there are Maoris who resent the pressure brought to bear on them to conform to what they regard as the pakeha mode of life. It is not, in fact, a *pakeha* but a *modern* way of life, common to advanced people ... Full realisation of this fact might induce the hesitant or reluctant Maoris to fall into line more readily. (16)¹⁶⁵

Hunn considered Māori urbanisation to be “the quickest and surest way of integrating the two species of New Zealander” (14). He saw schools, too, as important to achieving this goal, describing them as “the nursery of integration,” and observing that “[c]hildren mix naturally where their less adaptable elders stand apart” (43).

Hunn’s terminology, while apparently recommending integration, describing it as “the obvious trend” (15), in fact, reflects a policy of assimilation.¹⁶⁶ Dunstall (1981) notes that Hunn “had failed to perceive the strong Maori desire for a separate cultural identity” (424-25). It seems inconceivable today that such language (and the clear implication of Māori as an inferior race) should feature in an official document such as this, yet Hunn’s report did in fact help set the direction of government policy for the next decade. The Minister of Māori Affairs, J. R. Hanan in his foreword to the report observed that Hunn’s recommendations

have a fundamental bearing on the well-being of the Maori people, the well-being of New Zealanders as a whole, and on race relations in New Zealand. This makes it all the more imperative that the public should know the facts of the Maori situation. (3)

¹⁶⁵ In titles and quotations I have used the original spelling and punctuation, for example, the word “pakeha” in lower-case, “s” added to Māori words, and no macrons.

¹⁶⁶ Hunn defines integration as being “[t]o combine (not fuse) the Maori and pakeha elements to form one nation wherein Maori culture remains distinct” and assimilation as “[t]o become “absorbed, blended, amalgamated, with complete loss of Maori culture” (15).

In this chapter, I explore the development in the Ready to Read series towards the portrayal of New Zealand as a bicultural society. I include discussion of a 1970s set of reading books (“Our Group”) published by the Department of Education that may perhaps have helped influence the approach to biculturalism within the later materials.

New Zealand books for children

New Zealand children’s books prior to the 1970s were notable for including Māori content, particularly traditional Māori tales, and accounts of historical Māori life.¹⁶⁷ Māori children, however, while featuring in many of the materials, were invisible as readers. Content was presented from a Pākehā perspective, written and illustrated for non-Māori children by non-Māori writers and illustrators. A. W. and A. H. Reed were prolific publishers (and writers) of books with Māori content.¹⁶⁸ Typical Reed books of this period include: *Wonder Tales of Maoriland* (1948, expanded and revised in 1964), *Rata and the Games he Played* (1951), and *Living in a Maori Village* (1954). Other publishers, too, responded to this obvious ethnographic curiosity about Māori with books such as *Kuma is a Maori Girl* (1961) and *A Maori Family* (1969). While there was a predominance of non-fiction, two popular fictional accounts (winners of the Esther Glen award in 1945 and 1964 respectively) were Stella Morice’s *The Book of Wiremu* (1944) and *Turi, the Story of a Little Boy* (1963) by Lesley Cameron Powell, each describing the day to day lives of a young Māori boy.

While publishers’ blurbs in books of this period emphasise the importance of children knowing more about their own country and its cultural heritage, it is clear (and sometimes stated explicitly) that the writers are referring to Māori cultural heritage, and that the books are intended for non-Māori readers. A

¹⁶⁷ By children’s books I mean books for children of all ages, not just picture books.

¹⁶⁸ Agnew (2007), referring to the long-lasting popularity of A. W. Reed’s various retellings of Māori myths and legends, describes “several generations of school children” being “raised on his *Treasury of Maori Folklore* and *Games the Maoris Played*” (1). Williment (1985) notes that A.W. Reed and A. H. Reed dominated local publishing from 1938 until the 1970s, when overseas publishing houses began to establish offices in New Zealand (142).

review by *The New Zealand Listener* cited in the blurb in *The Book of Wiremu* (5th Edition 1958) praises the book for “giving the pakeha children some understanding of Maori life and a necessary knowledge of those Maori words which should be part of the ABC of language for every New Zealand child.” The blurb for *Wonder Tales of Maoriland* (1964) states, “[t]hese and many other stories are the well-loved legends and folk tales of the Maoris of New Zealand.” This book, as well as several others published by Reed, features child characters Rata and Hine, and the blurb goes on to say that as Pakeha children “share the adventures of this little Maori girl and boy they will learn a great deal of the life they lived long, long ago.”

Books (and blurbs) such as these accentuate the “otherness” of Māori, an alien (and inferior) race, separate from “other New Zealanders.” The inclusion of glossaries and explanations of Māori language and culture also emphasises the positioning of these books as being intended for non-Māori readers, as does the use of “we” versus “they” or “them,” as shown in the following extract from *A Maori Family* (1969):

The Maori people are brown-skinned and most of them have dark wavy hair. They came to New Zealand hundreds of years ago. At one time they lived in villages called ‘pas’ but now most of them live in houses just like all other New Zealanders. (4)

Robert likes school and works very hard at his lessons. How many Maori children can you see in this picture? And how many white children?

They are all good friends. They work and play together. (15)

The emphasis on the difference between Māori and non-Māori incorporates instances of stereotyping, as shown in the following example:

Mr Te Oka climbed onto the bulldozer and started it up. He was using it to make a road up to a new cowbail. The bulldozer pushed the dirt and rocks out of the way. Maoris are very good at driving bulldozers and heavy earth-moving equipment.
(19)¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ The front cover of *A Maori Family* has a photograph of Mr Te Oka driving the tractor.

This condescending attitude to Māori by Pākehā writers was not uncommon. In *Nicky and Wi* by Iris Wallace (1964), the Māori title character, Wi, is described as “a little, brown elf of a boy” (12) and his function in the story appears to be as an admiring observer of all that Nicky, a Pākehā boy, has to show him. There is a similar assumed view of Pākehā superiority in *John and Hoani* by Valerie Grayland (1965). This book is set in the nineteenth century, and describes the experiences of seven-year-old John who has come to New Zealand from England with his missionary parents. Calman (2012) describes the “prevailing belief” (from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s) that “the greatest favour that could be bestowed on Māori would be to turn them into ‘brown Britons.’”¹⁷⁰ When John sees Māori for the first time, the following conversation takes place:

“Look at their faces, mother. Their skin is all carved.”

“They call that tattooing,” said a young man, Peter Elkin. He had come to stand beside John and Mrs. Grey.

“Tattooing,” repeated John. “It’s as if they had half circles and feathers and all sorts of things drawn on their skin. Lines going round and round. They’re ugly.” (21)

Elkin, who has been hired to help with the mission because he can speak Māori, explains, “They think it’s beautiful, John. It’s a sign of importance. A great chief is always finely tattooed” (21). The conversation ends here with no information about John’s reaction.

Later when John sees the sewing done by some of the Māori girls his mother is teaching, he is “surprised to see how bad the stitching was” (54). He notes that some of the girls “tried to thread a needle by tying the cotton round the eye. Then they wondered why they could not pull it through the cloth” (54). He is told by his mother not to laugh at them because they will soon “be making clothes for themselves” (55), clearly implying the assumed superiority of the European style

¹⁷⁰ See “Māori education – Mātauranga - Missionaries and the early colonial period.”

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-education-matauranga/page-2>

of clothing. There is no acknowledgement of the handcrafted traditional Māori clothing the girls are already wearing.

The balance is redressed somewhat in *The Book of Wiremu*, and *Turi, the Story of a Little Boy* where Māori lifestyles are portrayed in more positive ways. These books acknowledge and value aspects of Māori culture. *The Book of Wiremu* conveys the delights (from a child's point of view) of a life free from the desire for material possessions. In this book, Anthony, a rather objectionable English child, is shown to be intrigued and delighted as he discovers the fun to be had in sharing Wiremu's play in the natural world. *Turi* presents an authentic and affirming portrayal of Turi's life with his great grandmother. It includes a memorable episode in which the Pākehā district nurse demonstrates her recognition of the effectiveness of Māori herbal lore in Granny's treatment of Turi's severely infected foot (36). The nurse has also learned to speak fluent Māori.

Some children's books of this period also feature Māori trickster characters. King (2003) describes "a continuing admiration within New Zealand society for the 'Maui' figure, the trickster or lovable rascal who bluffed and charmed his way through life" (514).¹⁷¹ In the children's books discussed here, written by non-Māori, this trickster figure is more of a patronising stereotype. Uncle Hori in *The Book of Wiremu* is portrayed as having good intentions but is, in effect, dependent on the generosity of the neighbouring prosperous Pākehā family. In *John and Hoani*, old Rewi is characterised as being clown-like and devious. He wears a bright red nightcap given to him by a sailor, and is described as being "so proud of the cap that it never left his head whether he was awake or asleep" (43). Rewi covets the iron cooking pot owned by John's mother, Mrs Grey, and when Mrs Grey refuses to give or sell him the pot, seizes an opportunity to steal it.

The prevalence of this stereotype is also uncomfortably evident in two articles, "The Businessman" and "The Big Shot" printed in *National Education* in 1954 and

¹⁷¹ Maui is a trickster hero of Māori myth, derived from the mythology of wider Polynesia (King 20).

1956.¹⁷² Both are written by teachers and intended as humorous skits “especially for Maori boys” (Gavin 211) to act out (in this case, much older boys than the intended users of Ready to Read). The former features a “crowd of Maoris,” all of whom speak in broken English. One of the crowd, George, is selling raffle tickets to the others for a racehorse that the audience (but not the characters) know is dead. When the raffle winner discovers he has been tricked, he says to George: “What you mean selling me this ticket, eh, you big fat lazy swindler – you puffed-out tuatua! What you say, eh?” An editorial note that accompanies this article describes the author as writing this sketch “for Maori boys who were very diffident about speaking in front of others” and reports that they boys apparently “enjoyed this so much that they later put it on at a concert” (373). “The Big Shot” features a group of Māori men in a pub, listening to one of the men boasting about what he has been doing. A stranger listening in challenges the speaker on the legality of his exploits (stealing pigeons), and the punch line is that the speaker describes himself as “the biggest liar in the Manawatu.” Such representations show Māori as either naïve and dependent, or chiefly as jokers and tricksters. They are presented as opportunistic and not entirely trustworthy, and as not conforming to Pākehā standards of behaviour.

Māori children in the 1963 Ready to Read materials

The 1963 Ready to Read series was developed in this political and social climate of cultural assimilation, at a time when many Māori children entering mainstream schools faced the challenge of learning in an unfamiliar language, and fitting into an institutional system that was very different from their lives outside of school. The misconceptions and negative assumptions evident in government policy and many children’s books were also apparent in the attitudes of some teachers to Māori students, again, demonstrated in articles in *Education* and *National Education*. In 1949, a teacher writing under the pen name of “Infant Mistress” had this to say in an article about the Māori child’s first month at school:

¹⁷² “The Businessman” by Garfield Johnson (vol. 36, no. 394, November 1954, p. 373) and “The Big Shot” by R. J. Gavin (vol. 38, no. 412, July 1956, p. 211).

His early childhood has been devoid of picture books and story books and he has had no experience of playing with dolls and mechanical toys which are part of every Pakeha child's life. The five-year-old Maori child commencing school has therefore a very restricted horizon and few experiences compared with those of a Pakeha child. (52)

After playing with blocks, beads, and toys the little Maori seems to realize in a few days that there is lots of fun, much more than at home ... (53)¹⁷³

In a 1952 *National Education* article, P. Prideaux-Pridham (also an infant mistress) wrote: "Maori five-year-olds are more immature than their European contemporaries [...] they are very frequently over-indulged" (54).¹⁷⁴

As mentioned previously, Simpson, in enacting the aim of presenting students with content "closely related to the environment of New Zealand children" (Simpson 48), ensured that Māori children were represented in the materials and that Māori schools were included in trialling. Yet, apart from the glimpse into the lives of the Katene family in *Sliding and Flying*, there is no obvious cultural difference between the Māori and Pākehā characters. The view of "the environment of New Zealand children" remains a Pākehā-focused view.

Furthermore (also mentioned in previous chapters), there is some evidence of stereotyping in regard to the character of Wiri in the *Boat Day* stories. He is portrayed as mischievous and undisciplined. When his class sail their boats in the school pool (22-23), Wiri is the child kneeling on the edge of the pool, being warned not to fall in by his teacher, Miss Pennyfeather. In "The Bluebird" when a neighbour brings a boat to school to show the children, Wiri is the one who "stows away" and is called "a scamp" by Miss Pennyfeather (33). When his class put on a circus to entertain their parents, Wiri pins a tail on the "pony" (two children under a sheet) and rides it, two things that the teacher had specifically forbidden. In collusion with his father, Wiri smuggles a pig into the children's circus, and lets it loose into the audience, creating an uproar and upsetting his

¹⁷³ "The Maori child's first month at school." *Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1949.

¹⁷⁴ "The Maori new entrant." *National Education* vol. 34, no. 364, 1952.

teacher and classmates. However, when Wiri's tricks turn out to be popular with the parents, Miss Pennyfeather laughs and asks, "What will you do next?" (60). The implication is that this sort of behaviour is expected from a Māori child. This idea is reinforced in a later story, "Susan in Hospital" (*Sliding and Flying*), when Wiri is chastised for having painted tiger stripes on the cast for his broken leg.

He had painted the plaster on his leg, and it looked very gay. The other children [in the ward] were all laughing at him when Nurse came in.

"Look, Nurse," said Wiri. "I'm a tiger. Look at the stripes I painted on my plaster."

"You come along right now and we'll rub those stripes off," said Nurse.

"Miss Maxwell didn't like them either," said Wiri. "She sent me back here." (89)

Although Wiri might be considered a successful innovator, the fact that he is Māori, and portrayed as a clown (literally and figuratively) at a time when Māori children were in general not achieving well in New Zealand schools, is troubling. It seems unclear how a child reader (Māori or Pākehā) might have been expected to respond to this story, particularly when Wiri is praised for his behaviour by the other parents and that his own father has colluded in "breaking the rules" in bringing the pig to school. In the national evaluation of the series in 1975, there was an almost unanimous call for these stories to be replaced. A Nelson teacher commented, "I don't like Wiri always being the one who gets into trouble."¹⁷⁵

It is interesting to note that McLachlan, in her 1996 thesis exploring the visual representation of Māori in School Publications materials, considers the *Boat Day* stories to be affirming of Wiri. She describes the illustration on page twenty-two as showing Wiri "glowing with pride about the brand new yacht he got for his birthday in which he beats all the Pakeha children's boats and wins the boat race" (112) but ignores the fact that the illustration also shows that Wiri is close to falling in and, in the text on the facing page, is admonished by his teacher.

¹⁷⁵ National Evaluation of Ready to Read (regional responses).

Similarly, McLachlan describes Wiri as being “the highlight of the circus play” and his father as taking “a major parent role in the school function” (112). This reading, however, ignores the accompanying text that shows how negatively his behaviour is received by Miss Pennyfeather and the other children (though not by the parents). It is clear from the text in the *Boat Day* stories that Wiri is not “fitting in” and that his behaviour is considered unacceptable by both his classmates and his teacher.

A third possible interpretation of Wiri’s characterisation is of Wiri as a trickster hero in the tradition of Maui rather than merely as the “clown” stereotype discussed above. The dimension of trickster hero is also evident in the Our Group materials, discussed later in this chapter.

A question of balance

An incident in 1964 exemplifies the challenges faced by the Department in providing educational materials that balanced authenticity with public perception. Beeby’s 1957 observation that “a publication produced by a government department is peculiarly vulnerable to criticism” (Wells 6) had been borne out twice, once in regard to the publication of the “Our Street” stories by Brian Sutton-Smith (see Chapter Six), and again in regard to *Washday at the Pa*, a bulletin for schools published in 1964. *Washday at the Pa* featured photographs taken by Ans Westra (with the full support of the family involved) of the home life of a rural Māori family. The publication, however, generated outrage from some who considered that it presented an inaccurate and disparaging view of Māori lifestyles. The Māori Women’s Welfare League, in particular, considered that the photographs showed the family’s living conditions to be substandard. They were concerned about the impression that this would create, describing the photographs as “inaccurate, atypical and unhelpful.”¹⁷⁶ There were also, however, many positive responses. Amery (2011) notes that in a “flurry of letters to newspaper editors there had been a strong mix both for and against a recall. No less than five editorials were devoted to the controversy, all for it not being

¹⁷⁶ Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. “Washday at the Pa controversy.”

<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/topic/952>

withdrawn" (37). He goes on to cite MP Sir Eruera Tirikatene, who described the booklet as depicting "a complete home unit, exhibiting the joyous spirit of togetherness and satisfaction with their home life."¹⁷⁷ The Department, however, removed the publication from circulation, and ordered that all copies be destroyed.¹⁷⁸

Māori children in the 1970 "Our Group" materials

During the 1960s, the educational achievement of Māori children continued to be a cause of concern. In a 1970 article in *Education*, Bryan Pinder, Director of Primary Education, described four impending publications designed to "give extra help to teachers in providing classroom programmes for children whose adjustment to school and progress in language, reading, and other activities are affected by circumstances in their out-of-school experience" (16).¹⁷⁹ An article in *National Education* entitled "Real-life basis for new readers" described the publications more bluntly as being "designed to help Maori and Polynesian children with difficulties at school" (464).¹⁸⁰ The new publications included three guides for teachers and a set of reading books for students. It is this set of reading books, known as "Our Group," that I discuss here.

The Our Group books featured six Māori children, and had initially been developed by two teachers, Penn and Mary McKay, for use in their own classes at a school in rural Hawke's Bay. "Real-life basis for new readers" stated that the main aim of the series was "to establish an early, close relationship between books and real life," and expressed the hope that the rural setting would be helpful for country children (464). The books were labelled as being part of the Ready to Read series but, unlike the 1963 materials, were not a national series,

¹⁷⁷ "Delightful, untainted," *Press*, 11 August 1964.

¹⁷⁸ Ans Westra had, however, retained the copyright for the photographs, enabling the subsequent publication of an extended version (sixty-four images spread over forty-eight pages rather than the original forty-four images spread over thirty-two pages) by Caxton Press later in the same year.

¹⁷⁹ "Forthcoming Publications for Teachers of Maori and other Polynesian Children." *Education*, vol. 19, no. 3. 1970.

¹⁸⁰ *National Education*, vol. 52, no. 570, 1970.

being distributed only to selected schools. Pinder states that “the department has had regard for the fact that these books are supplementary to the main series of Ready to Read and have a special relevance to certain pupils in certain kinds of schools” (19). Copies were also sold in Government bookshops, and Price Milburn (PM) bought the rights to sell the books overseas.¹⁸¹

The development process for this Department-funded series was significantly different from that used for the 1963 Ready to Read materials. Correspondence in National Archives suggests there was some involvement by commercial publishers Reed and PM, both of whom were already involved in publishing books with photographs by Penn McKay, in bringing the books to the attention of the Department of Education. Although there appears to have been an editorial committee (chaired by the officer for Māori education, and consisting of the McKays, the reading advisor for Māori education, an advisor to junior classes, and the editor of School Publications), as far as I have been able to discover, there was no trialling of the materials.¹⁸²

The Our Group books are a collection of photographic caption texts divided into four sets of increasing complexity.¹⁸³ Set A comprises three caption books, *Machines*, *Country Life*, and *Town Life*, each of which features photographs accompanied by one- or two-word captions, described by Pinder (1970) as words “of strong meaning” (17). The equivalent term used in regard to the 1963

¹⁸¹ The Department records are somewhat confusing in this respect: there is a January 1971 letter from A.H. & A.W. Reed referring to Reed having the rights to all sales of Our Group outside New Zealand, but another letter from Price Milburn in February 1971 refers to themselves (PM) as having the rights. See Works cited: Our Group (administration papers).

¹⁸² In correspondence from June 1970, both School Publications Editor in Chief, Pat Earle, and Mary Simons (for the Government Printer) refer to missing documentation in regard to this series.

¹⁸³ The use of photographs rather than illustrations in instructional reading materials had become widespread in the 1960s. Examples include Price Milburn’s *Instant Readers*, a set of caption texts (“Here is Mum. Here is Dad” and so on) and *Country Readers*, stories about country life.

materials would presumably have been “interest words.” Selected pages from the Set A books are shown in Figure 11.1 below.



Figure 11.1. Pages from the three books in Our Group, Set A.

The thinking behind these books seems influenced by Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s concept of the Organic Vocabulary (described in *National Education* in a series of articles in 1955 and 1956). Ashton-Warner was an advocate of helping Māori children build a repertoire of words in English of great personal meaning that could be used as the basis both for creating their own stories, and for creating a bridge to the standard English of classroom reading materials. A major difference, however, is that Ashton-Warner’s Organic Vocabulary involved children choosing their own words. The first two Our Group books, *Machines* and *Country Life*, may indeed have included images of interest to students but they reflect an adult view of life. There is nothing directly related to children’s experiences: no creeks, trees, bush, food, children, family members, or pets, and no Māori words, not even words (such as pipi or kai) that were in common usage by both Māori and Pākehā. The subject choices are also uncomfortably reminiscent of the stereotypical ideas of Māori (“very good at driving bulldozers and heavy earth-moving equipment”) portrayed in *A Maori Family*. The

photographs within the third book, *Town Life*, suggest, perhaps, an attempt to “prepare” country children for the realities of Pākehā urban life.

The books in Set B introduce the six Māori children (Anna, Richard, Lee, Patrick, Vienna, and John), and show them taking part in school activities.¹⁸⁴ In total, forty classroom activities are described in the Set B books, covering maths, music, and reading, as well as school clothes, playtime, lunchtime, and home time.

Set C includes home settings. Bizarrely, for books endorsed by the Department of Education, much of the content in Set C is strongly gender-stereotyped, an aspect, as discussed in previous chapters, that was already considered by many to be problematic by 1970. *What Girls Like* shows the three girls dressing up, baking, having “parties,” and playing with dolls, while *What Boys Like* shows the boys fishing, horse riding, swinging, climbing trees, playing football, sliding, and play-fighting. In *Helping at Home*, the boys “dig the garden,” “wash the car,” and “collect the firewood,” while the girls “weed the garden,” “wash the dishes,” and “sweep the floor.”

The Set D stories are about the children’s adventures in mostly outdoor settings. These stories were intended to align with the reading levels of the Ready to Read little books, beginning at the level of *Where is Timothy?* (Pinder 19). While lively, exuberant, and engaging in regard to the fun that the children appear to be having, these Set D books are problematic in several respects. The children are shown to be playful, confident, independent, and able to plan and work together. The stories depend for their humour, however, on the stereotype (as in the Wiri stories) of Māori children as tricksters or “benders of rules.” In *Fishing*, Patrick tricks the other children by getting into the water and pretending to be a fish. *The Trick* begins with the teacher playing a trick on the children (giving them paintbrushes with no bristles), and the children returning the joke by painting spots on Anna’s face and pretending she is sick. Both *The Boat* and *Ghosts* feature various children scaring the others by dressing up as ghosts, and in *The Dam*, Patrick frightens Lee with a piece of seaweed that she thinks is an eel.

¹⁸⁴ Presumably these were the actual names of the children. It is interesting to note that none of them have Māori names.

Although the other children have turns in playing tricks, Patrick seems to have been singled out as a “Wiri” character in these stories: he is the one who tricks the children in *Fishing*, gets stuck in a tree with Richard in *Tree-climbing*, makes Anna and John laugh (and, later, appears to be having his ear tweaked by Vienna) in *The Hut*, and tricks Lee with seaweed in *The Dam*. While most of these antics are relatively humorous, there is a more disturbing episode in *The Bulldozer* when Patrick decides to climb onto an unattended bulldozer even though he has been warned not to do so. There is no doubt as to the characterisation of Patrick as “the naughty child” here, as shown in the following text extracts:

“I’d like to drive
the bulldozer,” said Patrick.
“Oooh, no,” said John.
“That is naughty.”

Patrick is on the bulldozer;
he likes the bulldozer.
Naughty Patrick is driving
the bulldozer.

“Hey, Patrick!”
yelled the bulldozer driver.
“Stop! Stop! You naughty boy.” (n.p.)

In the following page spreads (shown in Figure 11.2), Patrick is caught and punished by the bulldozer driver.

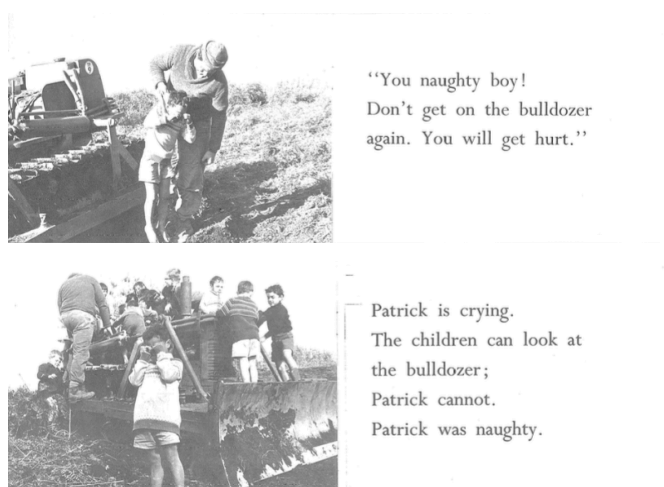


Figure 11.2. The final pages of *The Bulldozer*.

The treatment of Patrick's character in this story is extraordinary, particularly in regard to the last two photographs showing the driver lifting Patrick by the neck of his jersey and Patrick crying. Furthermore, this is one of the few stories that show children other than the "group of six" so that, by being excluded, Patrick is effectively being contrasted with the "good" (mostly) Pākehā children.

Ironically, one of the greatest shortcomings of the entire *Our Group* series is the decision to centre it on the six Māori children. While the intention was sincere, this focus, coupled with the positioning of the books as a series for readers who are having difficulties, reinforces the perception of Māori children as struggling learners. It also suggests an otherness, an assumption that they are different from others solely because they are Māori. This perception could have been easily avoided by capitalising on opportunities to include other children in the photographs: this would have shown the six focus characters to be part of an integrated school community, as indeed they would have been. In the few photographs that include other children, there are some delightful examples of natural interactions. There is a photograph at the end of *Hometime* (Set B) that shows three boys (Māori and Pākehā) seated on a horse (shown in Figure 11.3). Patrick is using the foot of one of the big boys as a "step" to help climb onto the horse, and the bigger boy is reaching out to help him. More photographs like this, reflecting a much more inclusive view of life in a country school, could have avoided some of the problems in the *Our Group* books in regard to the perception of Māori as different.



They climb
on the horses.

Figure 11.3. *Hometime*, *Our Group* Set B (16-17).

Again, it is ironic that in a series that focuses on the experiences of six Māori children, there is an almost complete absence of any thing uniquely Māori in what the children do. There are several missed opportunities to explore Māori cultural contexts. As mentioned, the photographs in Set A could have shown contexts of greater cultural relevance. In *Playtime* in Set B, “Lee plays with the pois” and “Vienna plays string games” (shown in Figure 11.4), but instead of taking the opportunity to show the girls sharing their expertise they are both playing alone.¹⁸⁵ There seems to be almost an avoidance of showing interaction

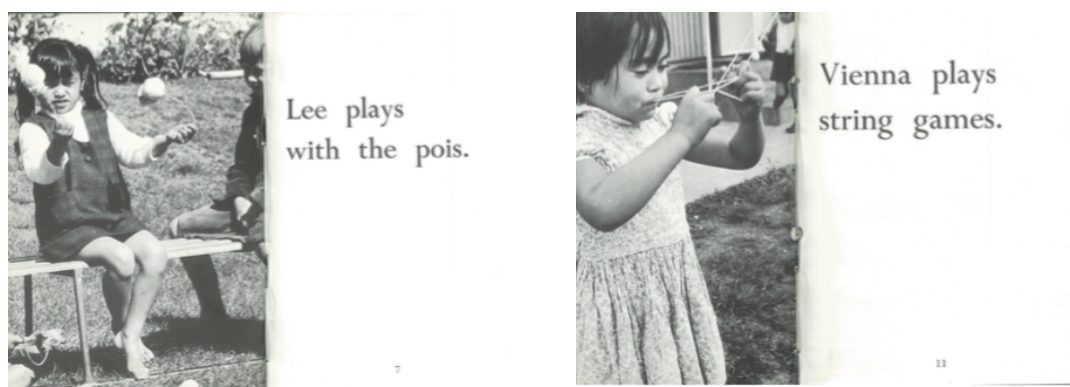


Figure 11.4. Lee and Vienna in *Playtime*.

with other children: there is a child watching Lee, but only half of the child makes it into the frame of the photograph, making her presence seem almost accidental.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, there is clearly someone holding the other end of the string for Vienna, but they have been culled from the photograph. There is another missed opportunity in *The Dam*. In this story, the children set off with Auntie Ngaio to collect sea food, a common Māori cultural context, but, instead, the focus of the story is Patrick frightening Lee with a piece of seaweed.

The books clearly demonstrate that there is more to making a book “bicultural” than having Māori children as main characters. In a 1973 article in *National Education*, Edward Douglas, senior lecturer in sociology at Waikato University, describes the Our Group series as “assimilative and not integrative in intent.” He

¹⁸⁵ While the inclusion of the terminal “s” for “poi” may seem odd today, this was common practice at this time.

¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, the photograph shows only part of the watching child’s head, which in itself is culturally inappropriate.

goes on to say, “There is nothing Māori about the series at all except the appearance of the children. The McKays and the Department have produced a series of 24 booklets about six Maori children in a Pakeha school/world” (152).¹⁸⁷

Overall, the Our Group books reflect the stereotypes and lack of cultural understanding evident in much of commercial publishing for children in this period. Despite their obvious shortcomings, however, the books demonstrate a genuine attempt by the Department of Education to create books of particular interest for Māori readers. Their use of photographs, commended by Wainwright et al (1975) as being “realistic and cheerful” (20), suggests authenticity and liveliness. In the Set D books, the photographs show real children successfully involved in real life contexts. The Our Group books highlight the complex challenges of catering for a widely diverse audience within a national reading series.

Biculturalism in the 1980s Ready to Read materials

As described in Chapter Six, the revision of the Ready to Read series occurred at a time of heightened social awareness and activism in New Zealand, particularly in regard to gender equality and the renaissance of Māori culture. From the mid-1970s there had been a shift in the focus of government policy regarding biculturalism from integration to multiculturalism (Dunstall 426), with increasing government recognition of Māori language and cultural practices. The 1960s and 1970s had also seen the beginning of what was to become spectacular growth in New Zealand picture book publishing, including, for the first time, works by Māori writers and illustrators. The first English-Māori bilingual picture book was published in 1973, and, as mentioned in Chapter Ten, in 1978, the School Publications Branch had begun publishing *He Purapura*, a Maori-language series for young readers.¹⁸⁸ (Also see Chapter Six: The literary environment.)

¹⁸⁷ There were, in fact, twenty-five Our Group books, not twenty-four.

¹⁸⁸ The School Publications Branch had also been publishing the Māori-language *Te Wharekura* series since 1960, but this was intended for secondary students (see Biggs (1968 76) and Schwimmer (1968 349)).

In 1984, two years after the first of the revised Ready to Read materials had been published, Renwick, spoke at a reading conference about the imperatives and challenges of portraying biculturalism within the series. (The following quotations are from his speech notes.) Renwick was explicit about the need to acknowledge New Zealand as a bicultural, if not multicultural society:

Those of us who belong to the pakeha majority have been monocultural for four or five generations. Why, the question is still asked, should we change now? There are, in fact, some very good reasons why we should. (1-2)

Renwick acknowledges the influence that educational materials may have on public perception, and therefore the importance of having

structures that enable teachers, publishers, and other to be aware of the many different concerns and points of view that may need to be recognised when decisions are being made about materials to be used in bi- or multi-cultural programmes. (9)

In his speech, Renwick describes the thinking and consultation behind the development of several of the new Ready to Read texts. The breadth of consultation during the 1980s revision of the series is unique in New Zealand publishing history. It involved New Zealand teachers and students, community organisations such as the New Zealand Parent Teachers' Association and The Māori Women's Welfare League, and kaumātua (Māori elders). In addition to instituting a wide programme of consultation, both the NAC and Editorial Committee included Māori representatives.

Renwick begins his discussion of biculturalism within the Ready to Read series with a focus on the portrayal of Māori families. He cites *I Can Read* (shown in Figure 11.5) as being

written to encourage parents to have their children read to them and to others. But it also conveys another message. The girl doing the reading has a pakeha mother and a Maori father. The fact of inter-marriage is treated unobtrusively and

naturally. *Matthew Likes to Read* as naturally presents a Māori boy and his mum in typical reading situations and obviously enjoying each other's company. (4)

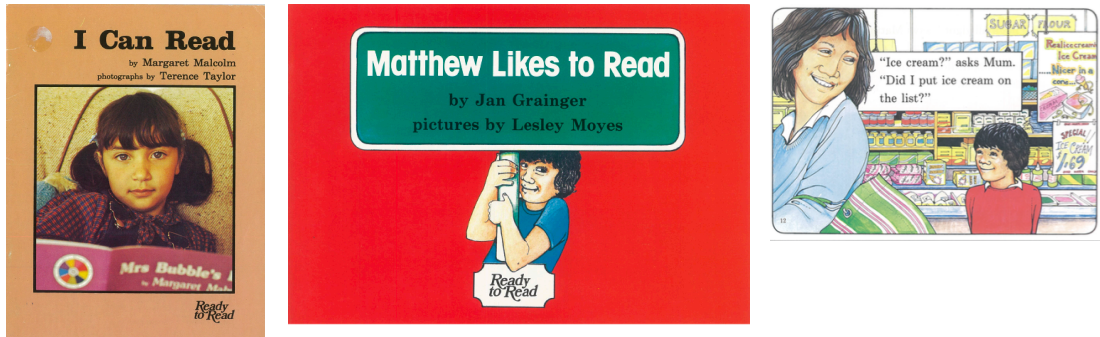


Figure 11.5. *I Can Read* and *Matthew Likes to Read*.

In further examples (shown in Figure 11.6), Renwick refers to the focus in *Nana's in the Plum Tree* on "the relationship between Nana and her grand-daughter Hine," with Nana "portrayed in the teaching and guiding role which grandparents have in Maori society" (5). He describes Aunt Mina in the story of *Paru has a Bath* as "a Maori aunt, not a pakeha aunt. She quite as naturally orders her niece and nephew about as she would her own children, and they do what she tells them" (4).

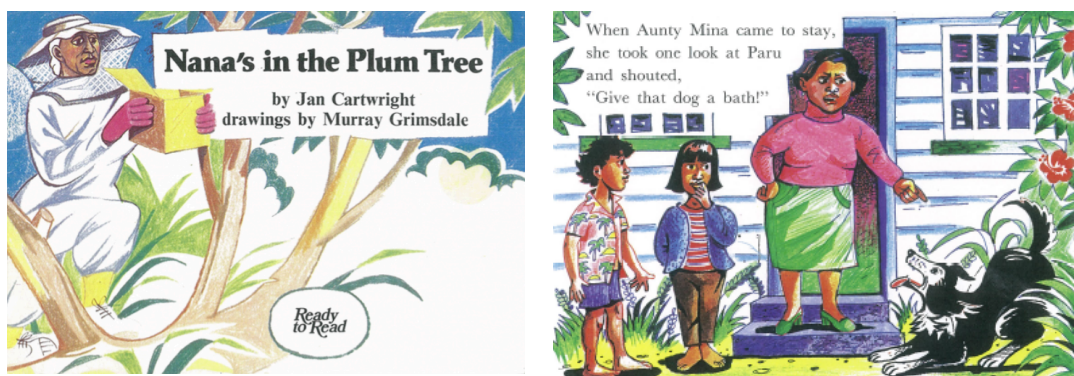


Figure 11.6. *Nana's in the Plum Tree* and *Paru has a Bath* (2).

Renwick describes how a further family story, “Uncle Joe” by Joy Cowley, (shown in Figure 11.7) was significantly altered as a result of trial feedback.

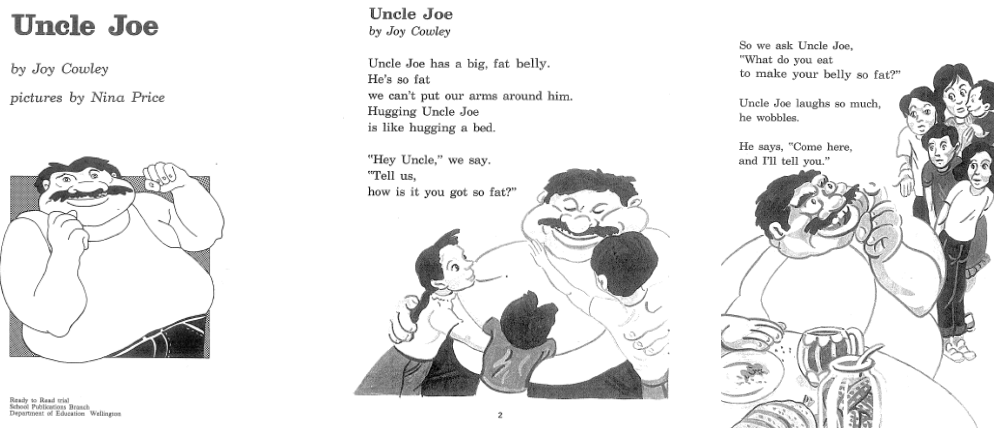


Figure 11.7. “Uncle Joe”, trial version, illustrated by Nina Price (25).

The central idea of the story is the banter between children and their uncle about his being fat. Renwick describes “Uncle Joe” as “one of the most popular of the new stories in the Ready to Read series,” with teachers and children who trialled it rating it as “of very high interest” (6). He notes, however, that some comments from trialling raised concerns about the appropriateness of making fun of fat people, about the acceptability of the language, and about possible stereotyping of Māori. Renwick reports:

Some thought it was bad mannered to address Uncle Joe so directly as ‘Hey Uncle,’ and that the language was coarse: the use of the words ‘belly,’ ‘kids,’ and ‘cheeky’ was considered to be socially unacceptable. Others enjoyed the colloquial language as being appropriate to the story. They said that pupils easily related to it. It represented, said one, ‘the clipped Maori speech patterns that some of my kids use.’ (6)

As mentioned in Chapter Ten, the New Zealand Parent Teacher Association stated that they “didn’t like anything about the story,” and hoped that “the words used will not be taught to young children as being acceptable language.” Although Renwick, somewhat disingenuously, suggests, “Uncle Joe could have been Italian, Mexican, South American, Tongan, or Maori,” he was perceived by

teachers and children as being Māori. Renwick notes that this perception “raised some serious questions about stereotypes, particularly in relationship to the mug, which was interpreted by some to be a beer mug” (6).¹⁸⁹ Renwick clarifies that it was “the pakeha members of the committee who felt protective” rather than the Maori readers of the story. The outcome was that the text was left unchanged but the illustrations were redone by Dick Frizzell (shown in Figure 11.8) with characters who are less ethnically specific. Renwick expresses the opinion, however that the story remains “identifiably Maori,” noting that “Joy Cowley, the author, is very successful in capturing the idioms and cadences of Maori speech, and her story is a firm favourite with Maori children and parents” (6-7). While, this may be true of the language, the replacement illustrations do not immediately suggest this is a Māori family.

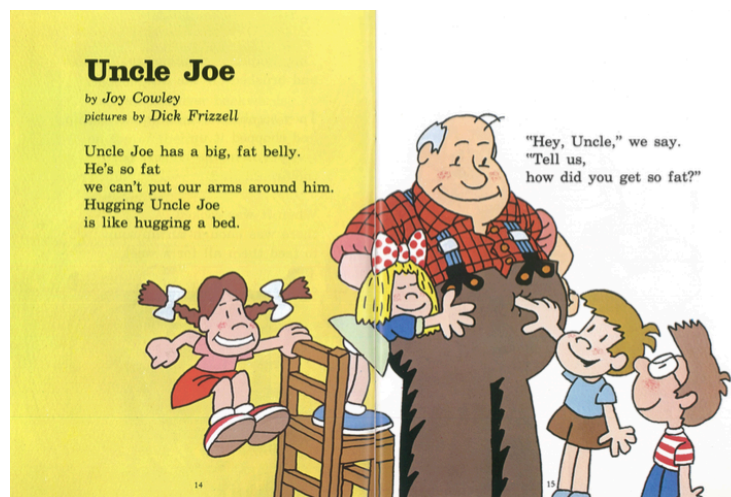


Figure 11.8. “Uncle Joe,” final version, in *Horrapotchkkin!* (14-15).

McLachlan (1996) takes exception to the lack of racial specificity in stories such as *Matthew Likes to Read* (shown in figure 11.6) and “Uncle Joe.” She refers to publishers’ use of “brown wash” in illustrations and considers that, because of this, “figures who are unequivocally Maori are less evident” than in the 1963 series (118). But McLachlan, focusing as she does exclusively on illustrations, fails to acknowledge the other “unequivocally Maori” aspects of the 1980s

¹⁸⁹ There is in fact a resemblance in the trial version, possibly unintentional, between “Uncle Joe” and popular contemporary Māori comedian, Billy T. James. See Belich (2011) <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/video/29889/billy-t-james>.

materials, such as the extensive use of Maori language, and the inclusion of Maori traditional tales (aspects discussed in Chapter Ten but not mentioned by Renwick in his 1984 speech).

Renwick goes on to make an important point about the risk of specific characters being seen as representative of a whole culture. He states:

The fact that there are as yet few stories about Maori nanas, aunties and uncles means that there is a strong tendency to expect each story and each character to carry too much meaning. Instead of being Hine's kuia, Nana is looked upon as a symbol of all Maori grandmothers. Instead of being one uncle among others, Uncle Joe is mistakenly taken to represent all Maori men. The danger is that the individuality of a character will be lost because it is placed under pressure to become a sociological construct. (10)

Renwick describes several examples where consultation resulted in “new insights” for the Ready to Read series developers, referring to *Nana's in the Plum Tree* as an instance of “the issues that must be considered when stories are clearly placed in a Maori cultural setting” (5). He states:

In the story Nana spends a lot of her time high up in the branches of the plum tree. Some Maori readers of this story when it was in draft felt uncomfortable about this. In older Maori tradition it would be offensive for Maori men to pass under the thighs of a woman, as it was a threat to their manhood. Some commentators recommended therefore that, out of a sense of respect for tradition, Nana should not be portrayed in that way. (5)

Renwick notes that the Editorial Committee took this feedback seriously and consulted kaumatua, but that the consensus was that attitudes had changed and that there was no need to change the story (5).

The traditional story of “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids” is a more controversial example. Renwick describes this story as being “generally well

received by the teachers and children who tried it out” and although some “found the wolf too frightening; others liked the scary quality it gave to the story” (7).¹⁹⁰ A more significant objection, however, came from a New Zealand writer, unidentified in Renwick’s speech but described by him as someone “whose views were bound to command respect” (8).¹⁹¹ Renwick states that she “found the symbolism of black associated with the villainous wolf objectionable [...] that children reading this story would be encouraged to associate black with evil, and that people of dark skin might well find this oppressive,” and “asked that the story be withdrawn or that it be changed so that the traditional opposition of white and black was reversed” (8). Renwick reports, however, that the editorial committee was reluctant to withdraw the story because as a Grimms’ tale it was part of world literature, and “they did not want to deny this one to New Zealand children” (8). The editorial committee went so far as to seek the advice of the Race Relations Conciliator (at that time, Hiwi Tauroa), who, while acknowledging the strength of the symbolism of black and white in literature and the arts, questioned its relevance to real life. The decision was made to publish the story.

Renwick describes one further example of consultation revealing awareness of different cultural viewpoints. This involved a retelling (in verse) of a traditional English ghost story, *The Teeny-Tiny Woman*.¹⁹² In the story, the teeny tiny woman finds a bone in a graveyard and puts it in her pantry. The ghostly owner of the bone comes to the woman’s house and demands the bone back, resulting in the frightened woman throwing the bone back into the graveyard (see Figure 11.9).

¹⁹⁰ In this tale, the mother goat rescues her kids by cutting open the stomach of the sleeping wolf, and tells the kids to each put a heavy rock into the wolf’s stomach before she sews it up again. When the wolf wakes up, he goes to have a drink from the river but sinks into the water and drowns. While this story has not been reprinted since 1998 (because of the high costs of printing the miscellanies), it may still be found in schools. In my time as Ready to Read series editor (1998-2007) I received several letters from teachers or parents objecting to the gruesome ending of this tale.

¹⁹¹ This was, in fact, Patricia Grace.

¹⁹² This story appears in *English Fairy Tales* collected by Joseph Jacobs, first published in 1880.

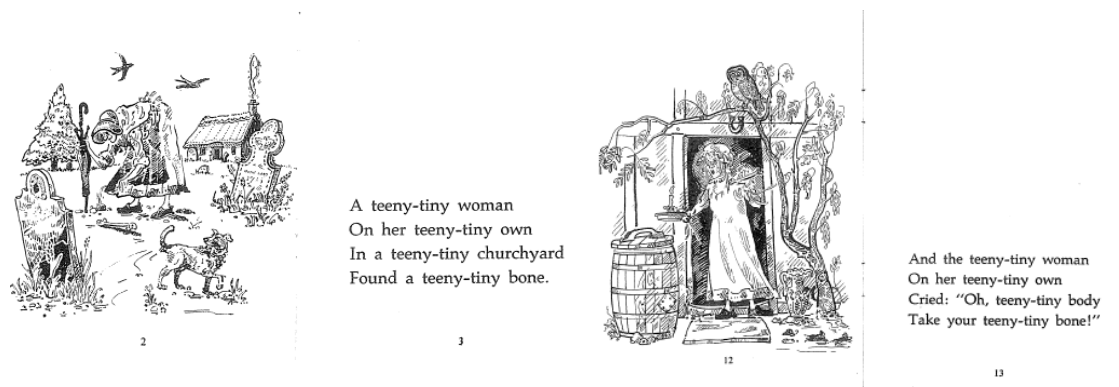


Figure 11.9. Trial version of *The Teeny-Tiny Woman* (2-3 12-13).

Renwick states that although this book proved popular with many children when it was trialled, the association of bones from a graveyard with food (bringing into contact two things that according to Māori beliefs “must never be brought together”) and the illustrations of ghosts and owls (evil omens to Māori) made this book, from a Māori viewpoint, inappropriate as a story book for young children. The decision was made not to proceed to publication.

In summary

The extent of the acknowledgment of Māori culture and lifestyles within the 1980s Ready to Read materials reflects not only changes in views towards biculturalism, but also the responsibility felt by the Department of Education to disseminate these views. As a national series distributed to all junior school classes, the inclusion of this content was sending a clear message to teachers, children, and families (because of the practice of children taking the books home) about biculturalism, including the expectation of having some knowledge of Māori language.¹⁹³ The breadth of consultation for the 1980s materials, reaching beyond the education sector into the wider community, provides new insights into New Zealand as a changing society. The changes in the representation of Māori children and lifestyles from 1963 to 1988 clearly position the Ready to Read materials as “social, cultural, historical document[s]” (Bader 1) and, as such, a significant aspect of New Zealand children’s literature.

¹⁹³ The inclusion of Māori language within the series preceded the establishment of Māori as an official language of New Zealand by several years.

Chapter Twelve

The Ready to Read series as New Zealand children's literature

Christensen (2003) reminds us that children's literature "is created and shaped under certain conditions and exists within a certain reality influencing the final product" (230). This thesis has investigated the "conditions" that have created and shaped the Ready to Read series and how, in turn, the Ready to Read series has created its own place in the canon of New Zealand children's literature. Over their first twenty-five years, the Ready to Read materials have played a central role in the reading experiences of young New Zealanders. They are significant not only as the first picture books that reflected the lives of New Zealand children, but also the first to acknowledge Māori children as part of their reading audience. There were also among the first (in the 1980s) to strongly acknowledge Māori language and culture as an integral part of New Zealand life.

In setting out to achieve the dual goals of helping children learn to read and develop a love of reading, the developers of both the 1963 and 1980s materials took instructional reading materials in new directions, exploring new ideas about the relationships between texts and young readers. We have seen the progression within the series from an emphasis on the familiar and realistic in the 1963 materials to the embracing of diversity and fantasy in the 1980s. While literary qualities were not the foremost concern of Simpson and her development team, we have seen how the inherent need for the "creative participation" of the reader and the clever crafting of text and illustration in the 1963 materials do in fact provide opportunities for literary reading experiences, even with texts of very few words. While literary qualities may have been an inadvertent but delightful outcome within the 1963 books, they were a deliberate intention within the 1980s materials. The focus in the 1963 series on meaningful stories and natural language paved the way for the more deliberate aims of the 1980s series developers to develop texts with "charm, magic, impact, and appeal" and to help children build understandings about themselves and others. Their aims are captured in the words of Bettelheim and Zelan:

What are needed are beginning texts that fascinate children, and convince them reading both is delightful and helps one to gain a

better understanding of oneself and others – in short, of the world we live in, and of how to live in it. (263)

Two aspects of the development process central to achieving this goal were the change to using freelance submissions and the use of script development workshops. The workshops created opportunities for writers, illustrators, and editors to explore new ideas together about texts for instructional reading. We have seen also how the 1980s series developers were able to draw on the talent of writers and artists of immense creativity and ingenuity.

It is clear that both the 1963 and 1980s series developers wanted the materials to be a “literature of New Zealand.” Not only did New Zealand writers and artists create the materials, but they were also trialled by New Zealand students and teachers (and, in the 1980s, by the wider community). We have seen how this concept of a national series was approached differently over each time period, reflecting changes in social attitudes. The 1963 series developers assumed a shared, almost entirely monocultural view of New Zealand society, a view increasingly challenged in the 1970s. Feedback from teachers in the 1975 evaluation of the series clarified the need to produce material that more accurately reflected the diversity of New Zealand students and, as shown in the following excerpt, also recognised the extent of the challenge:

The group are firmly of the opinion that it would be almost impossible to devise a National system which would satisfy all claims and shades of opinion – in fact such a series could please nobody in the long run and would be vulnerable to the vagaries and vicissitudes of changing opinion.¹⁹⁴

In fact, the 1980s series developers through careful planning and extensive consultation *did* achieve the goal of presenting material “close to the interests and experience of young children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, home

¹⁹⁴ This comment is included in feedback from the Nelson region as part of the 1975 national evaluation of the series. See National Evaluation of Ready to Read (regional responses).

circumstances, and locations” (*Reading in Junior Classes* 85). In attempting to represent the diversity of children’s lives, however, it follows that for any one child, the level of familiarity with the overall content of the series would be reduced. While the variety of the 1980s materials provided opportunities for teachers to help children build their awareness of themselves and the world around them, at the same time it added to the complexity of the reading task.

Ready to Read as an instructional reading series

While my focus in this thesis has been on the literary and socio-cultural aspects of the Ready to Read materials (and the implications of these aspects for readers) the primary purpose of the series was (and is) to help children learn to read, and as such, it requires some comment. As I have demonstrated (and as implied by C. S. Lewis) there is a fine balance between controlling the level of text difficulty and creating instructional reading materials that are engaging for readers, particularly beginning readers. In previous chapters (in particular Chapters Three, Four, and Eight) I have explored some of the ways in which this was done, such as through the judicious use of book titles to introduce contexts, natural language, carefully structured stories (often humorous), familiar contexts, and illustrations. Furthermore, the effectiveness of any instructional reading text depends not just on the text but on the way the text is used. While there is no specific data on the effectiveness of the 1963 and 1980s Ready to Read materials, there is evidence that makes it possible to draw some tentative conclusions.¹⁹⁵ In so doing, I draw also on my own experience in using the Ready to Read series, my subsequent experience as a developer of Ministry of Education curriculum materials (including, for twenty years, the Ready to Read

¹⁹⁵ There is no national data that specifically tracks children’s achievement in reading in the early years of school. Even if there were, this would not be specific to the use of the Ready to Read materials. As described in both the 1962 and 1985 series handbooks (and in later Ministry handbooks as well) effective classroom reading programmes involve the use of a variety of instructional materials and approaches, meaning that there are many overlapping influences on children’s reading.

series) and my involvement in literacy projects, advisory groups, and professional development for teachers.

A key driver for the establishment of the Ready to Read series was the perceived ineffectiveness of the *Janet and John* materials in helping children develop independence in reading, with children becoming over-reliant on the pre-teaching of vocabulary. The features of the 1963 Ready to Read materials (their focus on meaning, the incorporation of familiar content, the use of natural language, the frequent repetition of words within a variety of sentence structures, carefully planned illustrative support, and a controlled gradient of difficulty) appear to have been effective in supporting children to progress as readers. There are two sources of indirect evidence that support this conclusion. One is the (incidental) inclusion of the materials in Clay's research into what children were able to do as readers. Another is the extensive, positive feedback from teachers about this aspect during the evaluation of the series in 1975.

The situation in relation to the 1980s materials is less clear-cut. While the trialling of the materials was extensive and included the use of Running Records to show exactly how students were able to manage the texts, there has been no large-scale evaluation of the overall, long-term effectiveness of the 1980s materials. In fact, this would have been almost impossible to do. The rolling revision process instituted after 1988, means that the series has never again been a clearly defined (and finite) set of materials.¹⁹⁶ Another complication has been the gradual disassociation of the Ministry of Education from the promotion of the series (although funding for publication continues) so that the central role of the materials in classroom literacy programmes is no longer assured. I return to this aspect later in this chapter.

¹⁹⁶ The Ministry of Education now provides an updated list online every few months but this does not take into account the many older Ready to Read books in schools that teachers may still be using. See

<http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Planning-for-my-students-needs/Instructional-Series/Ready-to-Read>.

Having said this, it is possible to apply what we now know about the features of effective instructional texts to the 1980s materials.¹⁹⁷ While *Reading in Junior Classes* states that the 1980s materials were intended to constitute a “graded” and “structured series” (83 85), these materials are, as a series, in fact, notable for their *lack* of structure and coherence. While the innovations of the 1980s greatly increased the variety and appeal of the materials, the use of freelance submissions did not easily allow for consistency of vocabulary or writing style. There was no longer an even spread of materials at each reading level nor a clear progression from one level to another. There were, for example, only three books at each of the blue and green levels, and unlike the situation in relation to the 1963 series, no supplementary texts (using the same basic vocabulary) from other instructional series. In fact, as described in Chapter Six, the 1980s series developers dispensed with the concept of a framework of basic words that had underpinned the 1963 series. The assumption appears to have been that commonly used words would naturally recur and that the use of “natural” language along with illustrations, careful levelling (using data from Running Records of students reading the trial texts), and teachers using a shared reading approach before students attempted to read the books independently would provide sufficient support.¹⁹⁸ Lois Thompson recalls that meticulous attention was paid to instructional aspects such as vocabulary, punctuation, and support for meaning, with these aspects often hotly debated at meetings.¹⁹⁹

As it turned out, however, there was little recurrence of basic vocabulary across the earliest levels of the 1980s series. While words were often repeated *within* individual texts, they were not necessarily used again in other texts (at

¹⁹⁷ Published sources of information include *Effective Literary Practice in Years 1 to 4* (2003), *The New Zealand Curriculum Reading and Writing Standards for years 1-8* (2009) (otherwise known as the “national standards”), and various communications documents sent to schools in 2014 and 2015 including “Ready to Read Update June 2015” at <http://instructionalseries.tki.org.nz/Instructional-Series/Ready-to-Read>

¹⁹⁸ For many students this may have been true but over time it has become apparent that for children with little experience of books and reading outside of school, consistency in vocabulary is an important form of support when learning to read.

¹⁹⁹ Personal communication.

least, not in texts at the same reading level). An example of the difference in approach (and in the consistency of the vocabulary) can be seen in the following comparison. *Early in the Morning* and *Grandma Comes to Stay*, the first two books at the red level (the first level) of the 1963 series, had eleven words in common (“Bill,” “come,” “Father,” “here,” “is,” “Mother,” “Peter,” “said,” “Sally,” “to,” “up”) and all of these words except the names of the three children appeared often in subsequent books. In contrast, *Old Tuatara* (1983) and *Fantail, Fantail* (1984), both books at the new magenta level, which preceded red, have only two words in common (“fantail” and “fly”), words that do not recur in any other texts at any other levels from red to green. Both stories include some high-frequency words that *do* recur in other texts (in *Old Tuatara*: “are,” “and,” “He,” “in,” “Not,” “said,” “the” ; and in *Fantail, Fantail*: “but,” “have,” “I,” “like,” “No,” “some,” “that,” “this,” “Yes”) but without the consistency and predictability of the 1963 series. The contrast in the reading task for children is clear.

Considered through an instructional lens, some of the 1980s series’ greatest strengths were also its greatest weaknesses. While the materials abound in variety and in “charm, magic, impact, and appeal,” the consequent loss of the clear gradient of difficulty apparent in the 1963 materials, placed a high demand on teachers in ensuring a manageable pathway for their students. Used alongside more structured instructional reading materials (and as part of a wider, balanced reading programme), the 1980s materials are likely to have been effective for many children. Perhaps the children who would have found them most effective, however, would have been children who were already well prepared for learning to read. The encouragement in *Reading in Junior Classes* for teachers to provide support for students through using the shared reading approach before children attempted to read the same texts for guided reading may also have reduced the chances for children in most need to build independence in reading. The recognition that the Ready to Read series was not meeting the needs of all learners is clear in the statement of a government Literacy Taskforce in 1999 that they would like to see “greater awareness being given to ensuring that the Ready to Read series includes texts that provide more support to struggling

learners” (16).²⁰⁰ Having said this, several of the 1980s materials remain in the series to this day, although not always in their original format.²⁰¹ (Many other books have been withdrawn over the years because of outdated content or format or, in the case of the miscellanies, the expense of reprinting.)

Beyond 1988

It is now thirty years since the end date of this research period and those years have been marked by significant changes within the education system. In 1989 New Zealand’s Education Act was passed, which ultimately led to the restructure of the Department of Education to become the Ministry of Education. The School Publications Branch was disestablished and, in 1993, the contract for educational publishing went to Learning Media, a Crown-owned company. Part of the rationale for the move was for Learning Media to earn revenue (both for Learning Media itself and for the government as a shareholder) by reversioning New Zealand-developed reading materials for international markets. In 2013, however, Learning Media closed down and the Ministry assumed the role of publisher, with services contracted out to a panel of “suppliers.” From 2014 Lift Education has been the supplier to the Ministry of Education of publishing services for the Ready to Read series.

The effectiveness of any instructional materials relies, however, on how they are used. A disconcerting aspect of the post-1989 changes has been the increasing separation between education administration, educational publishing, and the end users of the materials. There is no longer centralised provision of professional development for teachers in regard to the Ready to Read materials. As described in Chapter Six, there had been an astonishing level of teacher knowledge about early reading in the 1970s and into the 1980s amid an

²⁰⁰ The Literacy Taskforce was convened as part of a Government Literacy and Numeracy Strategy with the goal: “By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write, and do maths for success” (Ministry of Education 1999 5).

²⁰¹ For example, *Fantail*, *Fantail*, *Greedy Cat*, *Number One*, and *T-shirts* have been retained but only as books for shared reading, not guided reading. Appendix Two includes a full list of the 1980s materials and also shows the texts that remain in the series today.

educational climate of professional enthusiasm and collaboration. Some key (overlapping) influences were the nationwide Early Reading In-Service Course, the spread of Reading Associations, and an inspectorate service that recognised, supported, and disseminated ideas about effective practice. Now, as more and more ERIC-trained teachers are reaching retirement age, the influence of ERIC is fading fast and there has been no equivalent professional development to replace it.

Changes to government procurement services mean that publishing contracts for the Ready to Read series (and *Junior Journal* and *School Journal*) have become short-term and contestable, and separate from contracts for the provision of communications and professional development to schools. Furthermore, the short-term nature of Ministry contracts, and the financial imperatives for the private companies involved means that opportunities for long-term, collaborative planning and development of the series have been lost. The education networks that enabled the development of the 1980s Ready to Read series and of the shared understandings about early reading instruction that underpinned effective use of the materials have disappeared, as has the deep pedagogical and institutional and historical knowledge held within the Department of Education.

A particular concern, evident in (unpublished) research and in conversation with professional groups in the course of my work, is the relatively low level of teacher awareness of the Ready to Read materials and, especially, the accompanying support materials. On a more positive note, feedback from trialling of the new materials, and conversations with teachers and providers of professional development who *are* aware of the materials and how they are intended to be used indicates that Ready to Read continues to delight children and help them develop as lifelong readers.

In summary

It is hoped that readers of this research will enjoy this insight into New Zealand's literary and educational history. There is much to admire and to learn from in the extraordinary vision, determination, ingenuity, and flair of the people behind the development of these unique materials. The influence of both the 1963 and

1980s materials is evident in the series today in its provision of texts with “charm, magic, impact, and appeal” that are, at the same time, part of a clearly structured series.

I have chosen to take a broad approach in this investigation of the Ready to Read series, incorporating discussion of as many materials as possible to convey the scope and significance of the series. Some features of the series, such as the crafting of the texts by the editorial team, the illustrators who helped bring the books to life, the inclusion of poetry and non-fiction, or the ways in which the traditional tales have been adapted for young readers are touched on only lightly. This research may be a starting point for others to follow.

The Ready to Read materials comprise a unique collection of New Zealand children’s literature. In seeking to reflect children’s interests and life experiences, they provide a valuable insight into the changing nature of New Zealand society, in particular the emergence of New Zealand as a bicultural nation. And in their availability to all children attending New Zealand schools, they have themselves become part of the construction of New Zealand childhoods. The Ready to Read materials continue to reflect the principles of effective reading instruction described in *Reading in Junior Classes* that “Children learn to read by reading” and “Children learn best on books that have meaning and are rewarding” (9). This investigation of the first twenty-five years of the Ready to Read series has demonstrated that, in contrast to Lewis’s expectations, it is indeed possible for a Ministry of Education to produce “good stories” for children.

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Appendix One. 1963 Ready to Read books

These materials were published in 1963 by the School Publications Branch, Department of Education, New Zealand.

The twelve “little books”

These books have no identified authors. The table below lists titles (in order of reading level) and the names of the illustrators. Copies of the little books and the first two miscellanies, *The Hungry Lambs* and *Boat Day* can be viewed at

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-readytoread.html>.

Title	Illustrator
<i>Early in the Morning</i>	Conrad Frieboe
<i>Grandma Comes to Stay</i>	Conrad Frieboe
<i>The Fire Engine</i>	Bill Jenks
<i>Where is Timothy?</i>	Dora Ridall
<i>Going to School</i>	Dora Ridall
<i>Playtime</i>	Dora Ridall
<i>Christmas Shopping</i>	Mary Roberts
<i>Saturday Morning</i>	Mary Roberts
<i>Painting the Shed</i>	Mary Roberts
<i>A Country School</i>	Paul Olds
<i>The Pet Show</i>	Paul Olds
<i>At the Camp</i>	Paul Olds

The miscellanies

The title of each miscellany is in bold print with the pieces listed underneath in the order in which they appear in the book.

Title	Author	Illustrator
<i>The Hungry Lambs</i>		
Boxer Comes to School	No attribution	Mary Roberts
Jenny Comes to School	Eve Kitchener	Jill McDonald
The Hungry Lambs	Eve Kitchener	Tom Coomber
Timothy Gets Ready	Eve Kitchener	Dora Ridall
<i>Boat Day</i>		
No More Swimming	Rae Huson	Peter Campbell
Boat Day	Rae Huson	Peter Campbell
The Bluebird	Rae Huson	Peter Campbell
Primers Make a Circus	Rae Huson	Peter Campbell
Wiri the Clown	Rae Huson	Peter Campbell
<i>The Donkey's Egg</i>		
The Yellow Duckling	Eve Kitchener	Richard Kennedy
Dabble Duck	Eve Kitchener	Richard Kennedy
The Magpie's Tail	Valery Carrick	Jill McDonald
The Lion and the Mouse	No attribution	Evelyn Clouston
The Donkey's Egg	Simone Chamond	Tom Coomber
A Donkey at School	No attribution	William Stobbs
<i>The Sweet Porridge</i>		
A Dog Plays Football	Rae Huson	Graham Percy
Presents from Hugo	Rae Huson	Graham Percy
Why Hares Have Long Ears	Valery Carrick	John Griffiths
The Three Goats	Emilie Poulsson	Richard Kennedy

Joe Bird	Helen A. Cutten	Ian Jackson
The Christmas Tree	Helen A. Cutten	Ian Jackson
Presents from the Tree	Helen A. Cutten	Ian Jackson
The Sweet Porridge	Wanda Gag	Jill McDonald
<i>The Stars in the Sky</i>		
The Mouse Circus	Eve Kitchener	Nigel Lambourne
The Gotham Way of Counting	No attribution	William Stobbs
The River Picnic	C. Hooker	William Stobbs
The Elephant and the Tortoise	Valery Carrick	John Griffiths
Forgetful Andy	Rae Huson	Ian Jackson
The Stars in the Sky	Joseph Jacobs	Evelyn Clouston
My Own Self	Joseph Jacobs	Jill McDonald
<i>Sliding and Flying</i>		
Tootle	Rae Huson	Nigel Lambourne
The Sticky, Sticky Pine	Florence Sakade	William Stobbs
Penguin Island	Rae Huson	Roy Cowan
"Excuse me," said the Rubber	Doris L. White	Jill McDonald
The Whale	James K. Baxter	No attribution
Sliding and Flying	Helen A. Cutten	Ian Jackson
The Pohutukawa Flowers	Helen A. Cutten	Ian Jackson
The Rescue	Helen A. Cutten	Ian Jackson
The Elephant	James K. Baxter	No attribution
Susan in Hospital	Rae Huson	Peter Campbell

Appendix Two. 1980s Ready to Read books and poems

These materials were published by the School Publications Branch, Department of Education, New Zealand between 1982 and 1988. Materials for shared reading are listed first, followed by books for guided reading, listed by alphabetical order of titles within each reading level. The title of each miscellany is in bold print with the pieces listed underneath in the order in which they appear in the book. Books that are still part of the Ready to Read series in 2018 (though not necessarily in the same format as in the 1980s) are marked by an asterisk.

Nursery rhyme cards for shared reading

The fifteen poem cards listed here are those referred to in *Reading in Junior Classes*, 1985. (The publishing information on some of the cards does not include illustrator attributions.)

Title	Illustrator (where named)
Baa, baa, black sheep *	Diane Perham
Hickory Dickory Dock *	
Humpty Dumpty *	Rosemary Turner
Jack be Nimble *	
Jingle Bells *	John Griffiths
Mary had a little lamb *	Deidre Gardiner
Old Mother Hubbard	
One, two, buckle my shoe *	Rod Ellis
One, two, three, four, five	
Pease Porridge hot *	Fiona Kelly

Books for shared reading

Title	Author	Illustrator
<i>The Bubbling Crocodile</i>	Margaret Mahy	Deidre Gardiner
<i>A Crocodile in the Garden</i>	Margaret Mahy	Deidre Gardiner

<i>A Crocodile in the Library</i>	Margaret Mahy	Deidre Gardiner
<i>The Crocodile's Christmas Jandals *</i>	Margaret Mahy	Deidre Gardiner
<i>Mrs Bubble's Baby</i>	Margaret Mahy	Diane Perham
<i>Shopping with a Crocodile</i>	Margaret Mahy	Deidre Gardiner
<i>Words</i>	Joy Cowley	Lesley Moyes
<i>I'm the King of the Mountain *</i> (published in both small book and big book format)	Joy Cowley	Dick Frizzell
<i>Kei hea te Taniwha?</i> <i>Where's the Taniwha?</i>	Fran and Leon Hunia	Murray Grimsdale
<i>Taniwha, Taniwha</i>	adapted by Fran and Leon Hunia	Wendy Hodder

Books for guided reading

Magenta

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>Boots for Toots</i>	Miriam Macdonald	Miriam Macdonald
<i>Fantail, Fantail *</i>	Margaret Mahy	Bruce Phillips
<i>Fun with Mo and Toots</i>	Miriam Macdonald	Miriam Macdonald
<i>Going to the Beach</i>	Margaret Mahy	Dick Frizzell
<i>I Can Read *</i>	Margaret Malcolm	Terence Taylor
<i>Old Tuatara *</i>	Joy Cowley	Clare Bowes
<i>Our Teacher, Miss Pool</i>	Joy Cowley	Diane Perham
<i>Sam's Mask</i>	Christine Cachemaille	Terence Taylor

Red

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>The Biggest Cake in the World</i>	Joy Cowley	Diane Perham
<i>Greedy Cat is Hungry *</i>	Joy Cowley	Robyn Belton
<i>My Bike</i>	Craig Martin	Craig Martin
<i>Rain, Rain *</i>	Joy Cowley	Nina Price
<i>The Smile</i>	Joy Cowley	Clare Bowes
<i>Where are my Socks?</i>	Miriam Macdonald	Miriam Macdonald
<i>Where is Miss Pool?</i>	Joy Cowley	Diane Perham
<i>The Wind</i>	Barbara Hill	Rosemary Turner

Yellow

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>Did You Say "Fire?"</i>	Joy Cowley	Penelope Newman
<i>Greedy Cat *</i>	Joy Cowley	Robyn Belton
<i>The Hogboggit</i>	Not attributed	Clare Bowes
<i>Nick's Glasses</i>	Christine Cachemaille	Sue Price
<i>Rosie at the Zoo</i>	Joy Cowley	Christine Ross
<i>T Shirts *</i>	Estelle Corney	Lesley Moyes

Blue

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>Blackbird's Nest</i>	Olive Harvey	Jessica Wallace
<i>Paul</i>	Glenda Laurence	Bruce Foster
<i>Saturday Morning</i>	Not attributed	Lesley Moyes

Green

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>Fasi Sings and Fasi's Fish</i>	Joy Cowley	Murray Grimsdale
<i>Thank You</i> (a collection of poems)	Various	Various
<i>The Wild Wet Wellington Wind</i>	Joy Cowley	Clare Bowes

Orange

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>A Cardboard Box</i> (two folktales retold as plays)	Barbara Beveridge	Winton Cleal
<i>Matthew Likes to Read</i>	Jan Grainger	Lesley Moyes
<i>Number One</i> (also published in big book format) *	Joy Cowley	Jill McDonald
<i>Pita's Birthday</i>		
No One Likes Skinny Hens	Retold by Rowena Buckingham	Peter Bromhead
Dandelion Clock	Joyce Le Pine	E. M. Cook
Rima Rakiraki	Adapted by Bea Yates	Sheryll Touvelle-Wright
Three Wise Men of Gotham	Traditional tale	Anita Vink
A Proper Soccer Ball	Glenda Laurence	Deidre Gardiner
Pita's Birthday	Joy Cowley	Murray Grimsdale
Pita's Birthday Cards	Not attributed	Not attributed
In Our Library	Sue Thurlow	Gavin Bishop
<i>The Big Bed</i>		
Sally Go Round the Sun	Traditional rhyme	Christine Ross
Jenny Comes to School	Eve Kitchener	Jill McDonald
Mo and Toots –Shapes are Fun	Miriam Macdonald	Miriam Macdonald

The Flood	Eve Kitchener	Rosemary Turner
Michael is a Clown	Dawn Bowker	Lesley Moyes
A Spider's Bedsocks	Phil Mena	Helen Moore
Pigeons	Joy Cowley	Murray Grimsdale
The Big Bed	Joy Cowley	Michael Reed

Turquoise

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>Paru has a Bath</i>	Fran Hunia	Murray Grimsdale
<i>Pets</i>	Joy Watson	Gavin Bishop
<i>Horrapotchkin!</i>		
Mr Finney's Turnip	Traditional	Clare Bowes
The Enormous Turnip	Retold by Fran Hunia	Gavin Bishop
Uncle Joe	Joy Cowley	Dick Frizzell
Horrapotchkin!	Margaret Mahy	Rosemary Turner
The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids	Retold by Fran Hunia	Nina Price
Crossing Water	Photographs	Various
As I was Going to St Ives	Traditional	Adapted from a non attributed illustration in an 1840 Banbury chapbook.
The Musicians of Bremen	Retold by Fran Hunia	John Griffiths
The Dog and his Bone	An Aesop's fable	Kate Bowes
Merry have we Met	Traditional	Graham Percy

Purple

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>Maui and the Sun *</i>	Retold by June Melser	Cliff Whiting
<i>Nana's in the Plum Tree</i>	Jan Cartwright	Murray Grimsdale
<i>The Rescue</i>	Rae Collins	Craig Martin
<i>Giant Soup</i>		
One Thursday morning ...	Not attributed	Ans Westra
Brrrm! Brrrm!	Margaret Mahy	Bob Kerr
The Magpie's Tail	Retold by Valery Carrick	Jill McDonald
Monkey Talk	June Walker Leonard	Clare Bowes
Good Knee for a Cat	Margaret Mahy	Lesley Moyes
For Want of a Nail	Traditional	Not illustrated
The Biggest Canoe	Retold by Barbara Beveridge	Diane Perham
Giant Soup *	Margaret Mahy	Robyn Belton
Flies Taste with their Legs	June Walker Leonard	Heather Angel
Uamairangi	Katarina Mataira	Robyn Kahukiwa
Skipping Rhyme	Marie Darby	Ans Westra
<i>Crinkum-Crankum</i>		
No More Cakes *	Retold by Barbara Beveridge	Diane Perham
Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!	Judith Holloway	Nina Price
The Musical Note	Ron L. Bacon	Not illustrated
The Lion and the Mouse *	An Aesop's fable	John Griffiths
Ducks are Waterproof	June Walker Leonard	Terence Taylor

Crinkum-Crankum	Margaret Mahy	Robyn Belton
"Farmer, Farmer, May We Cross Your River?"	Jan McPherson	Jenny Hames
The Pohutukawa Trees	Ron L. Bacon	Elaine Power
Crocodile Lake	Margaret Mahy	Deidre Gardiner
The Scary Ghosts	Lynette White	Not illustrated
The Umu	Fran and Niki Hunia	Ans Westra

Gold

Title	Author	Illustrator or photographer
<i>The Great Grumbler and the Wonder Tree</i>	Margaret Mahy	Diane Perham
<i>Night is a Blanket</i>		
Mark and the Salty Sky	Catherine Duthie	Lynette Vondruska
The Night Sky (photographs)		Various
Washing Lines	Margaret Mahy	Diane Perham
E Ko, E Ko and Morning Chorus *	Sydney Melbourne	Not illustrated
Ruru (photographs)		Geoff Moon
The Story of Rona *	Retold by Fran and Leon Hunia	Murray Grimsdale
Mangoroa (photograph)		National Museum of New Zealand
Why the Moon has Shadows on her Face	Retold by Margaret Mooney	Elspeth Williamson
Evening in a Samoan Village (picture)		Triska Blumenfeld
Three Little Billy-goats	Retold as a play by Clive Sansom	Jan Van der Voo

A Walk on the Moon (photographs)		NASA
Shadows (pictures)		Clare Bowes
The Night was Dark and Stormy	Not attributed	Clare Bowes
The Sweet Porridge	Retold by Wanda Gag	Jill McDonald
Night is a Blanket *	Barbara Hill	Clare Bowes
Last Song	James Guthrie	Jessica Wallace
<i>Dog Talk</i>		
The First Bow-wow Poem	Sam Hunt	Dick Frizzell
Little Red Fox	Retold by Barbara Beveridge	Clare Bowes
The Poppy	Ron L. Bacon	E. M. Cook
The Second Bow-wow Poem	Sam Hunt	Dick Frizzell
Dry Days for Climbing George	Margaret Mahy	Bob Kerr
The Pines	Margaret Mahy	Ministry of Forestry
William	Denise Irvine	Lynette Vondruska
Rosie Climbs the Sky Tree	Margaret Mahy	Nina Price
Dog Talk	Sue McCauley	Margaret Nieuwland
Antarctic Tea	Retold by Don Long	Don McAra
Ice Cream	Evelyn Tuuta- Erueti	Penny Newman
The Musical Instruments Argue	Susana Tuisawau	Elsbeth Williamson
Three Spiky Balls	Patricia Irene Johnson	Penny Martin

Appendix Three. The Ready to Read script selection criteria

These criteria were developed by the National Advisory Committee for the Ready to Read Revision and Extension Project, and published in *Developing Lifelong Readers* by Margaret Mooney, 1988.

Does the story have charm, magic, impact, and appeal?

Will the child demand that the book be reread, or will they revisit it by themselves?

Will chunks of language and meaning resurface at later times?

What is the book's lasting appeal?

Will the book stand repeated readings?

Is the idea worthwhile?

Does the author's message have merit for its own sake? (Many stories contain a moral, but morals should be inherent in the story and not presented as a reason for the reading.)

Is the idea worth the time and effort spent on the reading?

Does the story say something new, or, if a familiar theme, does it offer a new view?

Is the story's shape and structure appropriate?

Does the shape and structure help to carry the reader through the story?

Does the story have a beginning, a middle, and an identifiable climax with an acceptable resolution?

Does the story create its own pace?

How has the author linked the episodes?

What gaps is the reader required to fill?

How does the author signal a change of pace, mood, or action?

Is the language effective?

Does the language suit the theme and the characters?

Does the language spark the child's imagination, and inspire thought?

Are there memorable phrases and/or sentences?

Do the characters act and speak naturally?

Does the author use book language to heighten the story's shape?

How much does the author leave to the reader's imagination?

Is the story authentic?

Is the story credible to the reader?

Does it avoid condescensions, stereotyping, and inaccuracy?

Does the author fulfill the promises engendered by the title, theme, and story shape?

Will it lead the child into further reading and learning?

Do the illustrations help the reader gain meaning from the text?

Are they appropriate for the theme and characters?

Do they make the meaning of the text clearer?

Do the illustrations reflect the mood of the story and give rise to feelings and emotions?

Do they complement the text, rather than compete with it?

Is the format of the book appropriate?

Do the book's size and shape suit the content and the reader, or do they merely fit a series format?

Do the typeface and size, spacing and line breaks match the reader's stage of reading development?

(Mooney, 4-5)