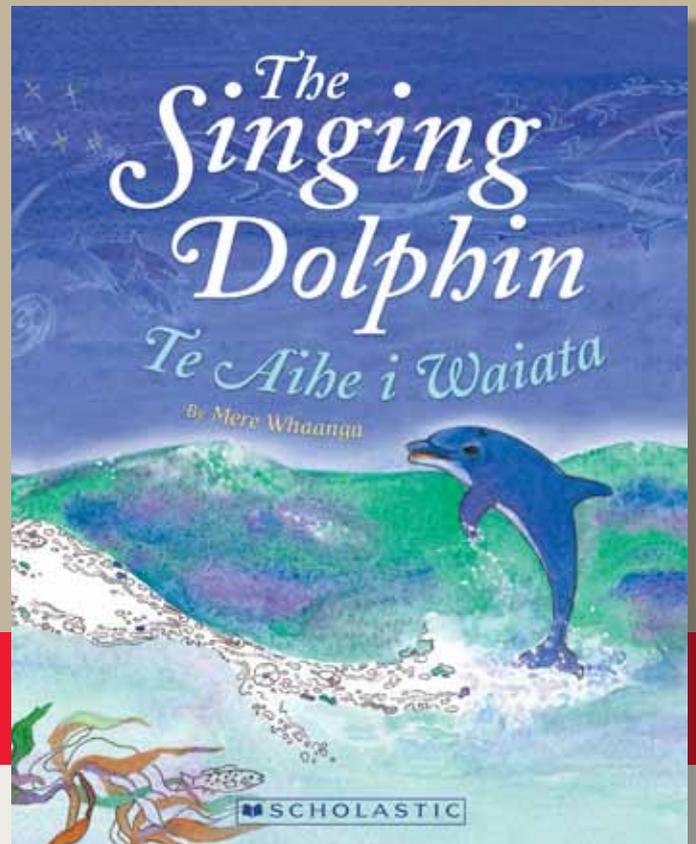


The Singing Dolphin

By Mere Whaanga

- Reading • Listening • Writing • Research
- Te Reo Māori • Art • Music • Drama



Synopsis

Between 2007 and 2009, the dolphin Moko lived and played in the sea near Te Ara a Paieka (The Pathway of the Whales) at Mahia Beach on the east coast of the North Island of New Zealand. *The Singing Dolphin: Te Aihe i Waiata* was inspired by Moko's time there. Told in Māori and English, Mere Whaanga has spun a tale in the traditional style of a Māori legend. Potiki, the youngest of three brothers, is tired of always being told he is 'too little'. One day, he stows away in his brothers' fishing canoe – with disastrous consequences. On discovering that Potiki has followed them, they throw him overboard into the sea, where he is transformed into a dolphin. In her grief, the boys' grandmother curses Tahi and Rua by turning them into rocks, their task to sing through the eons the song that Potiki never learned: how to transform from sea creature back to human form.

The poetic language of the text is supported by Mere's delicate and swirling illustrations. Her artwork brilliantly captures elements of land and sea, entwining them with Māori motifs.

About the Author

Mere Whaanga, of Ngāti Rongomaiwahine and Ngāti Kahungunu descent, is a writer, an illustrator, a historian and an academic. Mere began writing following the realisation that, as Māori elders passed away, there was a danger of losing forever many tribal legends. She began her publishing career by self-publishing *The Legend of the Seven Whales* as told to her by her father, in both English and Māori. This was a finalist in 1990 for the NZLA Russell Clark Award for Illustration and republished by Scholastic as *The Legend of the Seven Whales of Ngai Tahu Matawhaiti / Nga Tahora Tokowhitu a Ngai Tahu Matawhaiti*. Its success was followed by Mere's own story of how the pāua got its colours, *Tangaroa's Gift / Te Koha a Tangaroa* and *Te Kooti's Diamond / Te Taimano a Te Kooti*. Mere lives at Mahia Beach in the Hawke's Bay.

Writing Style

This beautifully illustrated story is written in both English and te reo Māori. Mere Whaanga uses poetic language to weave the story in the style of a traditional Māori legend. Adults and children will be captivated by both the illustrations and the text. The layered nature of the story means readers will gain greater understanding of the characters with each subsequent reading.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. Who or what is the main character? Read the title. Do you think dolphins can sing? Where do you think this story will happen? Introduce the idea that where a story happens is the setting. (Cover)
- What is a generation? Can you guess how many years 'many generations ago' might be? Why might the whales need a pathway? (pp.4–5)
- Why do you think the first grandson is called Tahi and the second grandson is called Rua? What do you guess the third grandson will be called? What are the 'works of the land'? What are the 'works of the sea'? (pp.6–7)
- What is a 'snare'? What is it used for? What are 'groves'? Why don't Tahi and Rua want Potiki to help? (pp.8–9)
- How do you think Potiki is feeling? What can you tell about how he is feeling from the picture? What did the birds do when they heard Potiki's song? Can you name any of the birds in the picture? (pp.10–11)
- What does 'fashioned a trap' mean? What might an eel trap look like? What are 'wetlands'? Why don't Tahi and Rua want Potiki's help? What happened when Potiki tried to follow his brothers? (pp.12–13)
- Why do you think Tahi and Rua didn't catch many eels? What did the eels do when they heard Potiki's song? What are the insects flying near Potiki? (pp.14–15)
- Do you think Potiki was brave or foolish to follow his brothers? Can you predict what Tahi and Rua will do when they discover Potiki? (pp.16–17)
- What does 'throw him overboard' mean? Why did Tahi and Rua leave? What was happening to Potiki's body? (pp.18–19)
- Why did Tahi and Rua lie to their grandmother? When Tahi and Rua wouldn't tell their grandmother where Potiki was, who did she ask? (pp.20–21)
- What does 'ancient' mean? How did Grandmother know the new dolphin was Potiki? (pp.22–23)
- What does 'grief' mean? What does 'cursed' mean? Can you think of another story you have heard that had a curse in it? What does 'eons' mean? (pp.24–25)
- Why might a dolphin swim along 'The Pathway of the Wales'? (pp.26–27)
- What does 'denuded' mean? What does 'eroded' mean? Is there a place near where you live that has eroded? Why can't the calling rocks be heard anymore? (pp.28–29)
- What does 'unfettered' mean? What does 'abundant' mean? Why does the dolphin leave? pp.30–31)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: IDIOMS

This story was inspired by a dolphin named Moko. Moko was a male bottlenose dolphin who associated with people on

the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand from 2007 to 2010. Moko, short for Mokotahi, a headland on Mahia Peninsula, was three years old as of July 2009.

Show this short clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq6zHf8O-1A>

Ask the children to play the role of a reporter, describing what they saw on the clip. Brainstorm the main points as a class/group and record them on a whiteboard for the children to refer back to. More images can be found here:

<http://www.voyagemahia.com/moko.asp>

ACTIVITY 2: SINGING THE SONG OF THE WHALES

Play samples of whale song to the class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WabT1L-nN-E>

Ask students to accompany the whale song by softly using body percussion, or give them instruments. The children can use their music to accompany the story in the following activity.

ACTIVITY 3: PUTTING ON A SHOW

Use the story as a basis for a play. As a class/group, reread the story and list all the characters. Assign roles and perform the story. The children who don't get assigned a role could provide the sound effects and music from the previous activity.

ACTIVITY 4: ILLUSTRATING THE STORY

Mere Whaanga's illustrations are beautiful and full of detail and texture. Show the children an example of crayon and dye resist and ask them to recreate a scene from the story.

ACTIVITY 5: NGĀ TAU

The first two grandsons in the story are called Tahi and Rua. Give students cards with the Māori numbers on them and in groups of 10 ask them to assemble themselves in numerical order. To make the game more fun, turn it into a version of musical chairs. Play some music while they dance and when the music stops they must form their ordered line with their group. Increase the challenge by going beyond ten.

ACTIVITY 6: STORY STARTER

Remind students that Potiki slowly transformed his body into a dolphin. Ask them to imagine their own body turning into an animal. Ask them to move about the classroom as the animal they've turned into. Ask them to draw the animal if they need to, before beginning writing about their new life as the animal they have chosen.

Written by Sarina Dickson



teacher toolkit

SCHOLASTIC