

# My NZ Story – Canterbury Quake

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### Synopsis

Maddy has just turned eleven and is a typical New Zealand pre-teen. She goes to school, loves singing and hanging out with her best friend Laura. However, Maddy's normal life changes in an instant when there is a massive earthquake in Christchurch in September 2010. Maddy and her family are lucky; their house is not badly damaged and they can stay there. Some of their friends and relatives are not so lucky. Maddy's aunty and uncle have no power or water for days and Laura's house is so badly damaged that she has to move away and go to a new school. In addition to the loss of her best friend Maddy has to endure aftershocks, help clean up liquefaction and suffer the psychological effects of trauma.

Just when things are getting back to normal there is another massive earthquake. This time the unimaginable happens. People die in the quake and Maddy and her family find themselves wondering why some people had to die while they were spared. Christchurch is a shadow of its former self with much of the central business district destroyed. Many people can't live in their houses and need to find temporary accommodation. Maddy's sister Tessa has to travel on two buses to attend another school because hers has been destroyed. Maddy's brother suffers from nightmares and begins wetting the bed. All of the members of Maddy's family live in fear that another earthquake will strike. Through all of this Maddy learns that strong family ties are important and that if you open yourself up to people, friends can be found in the most unlikely of places.

### Text Type

*Canterbury Quake*, Christchurch, 2010–11 is the latest in the successful My New Zealand Story series, which makes history come alive with vividly imagined accounts of life during a particular time period or event. The story is written in diary form and told from the point of view of Maddy, an 11 year-old girl. Through Maddy's diary entries the reader is given a fascinating insight into life in Christchurch after the massive earthquake in September and the devastating aftershock in February. In her diary Maddy vividly describes the destruction of her beloved city, the terror of living in a state of emergency and the constant fear that another after shock will strike. Maddy's thoughts and feelings are clearly articulated in her entries. She is a credible character who deals with many issues which teenagers will be able to relate to such as having a friend move away, having to deal with changes which are beyond her control and dealing with family issues.

*Canterbury Quake* is a fascinating account of a significant event in recent New Zealand history. While most characters in the novel are fictional, most of events described are factual. The novel contains a historical note and some interesting photographs. It has broad appeal for both boys and girls and is a fast-paced read that is highly engaging.

Themes include family, tragedy and heroism, resilience, dealing with change and starting over.

## Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 160–173, pp. 9–24, pp. 24–93 and pp. 94–159.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and inferences. Wherever possible, encourage students to link Maddy's experiences to their own lives and broader understanding. Students should also be encouraged to identify themes and explain how they are developed in the novel.

## Introducing the Novel

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

- When and where is the story set?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- The story is told in diary form. What do you expect from a novel set out in this way?
- What do you already know about the Canterbury earthquakes?

Read the Historical Note on pages 160–173 and study the photographs.

- What was the magnitude of the earthquake that occurred on September 4th 2010?
- Why was the timing of the quake so fortunate?
- When did the aftershock that destroyed the city centre occur?
- How many people died in this quake?
- What were some of the devastating effects of the quake?
- What is the Christchurch Cathedral a symbol of?
- How are people still being affected in Christchurch years later?
- Why won't the houses in the suburb of the Pacific Park be rebuilt?
- How many aftershocks have occurred since the original quake in September 2010?

Teacher reads pp. 9–24 aloud. Students follow along in their books.

### Comprehension pp. 9–24

- What does Maddy desperately want for her 11th birthday? What does she end up getting? Why isn't the day a 'total waste'?
- Who is Laura?
- Why does Maddy like singing with Laura so much? What are the girls practising for?
- What are some of the benefits of library duty?
- What is Maddy's all-time favourite DVD?
- Who are Zoe and Bettina? What does Zoe do that upsets Maddy?
- Why does Maddy love going to Laura's house?
- What does Miss Finch want Maddy and Laura to perform at? How does Maddy feel when she finds out that Zoe and Bettina are performing as well?
- Describe the earthquake. Why is it so scary? What does Maddy's house look like afterwards? Why is it the 'most awful night ever'?
- Why do you think Maddy's dad takes photos before he tidies up?
- What news does Maddy's dad learn about the quake from the radio?
- Why does Maddy's dad dig a hole in the garden?
- What is liquefaction? What problems can this cause?
- Why does it take Maddy and her dad so long to collect her grandmother?

### Discussion

- What do we learn about Maddy and her family in these pages?
- Is 11 too young to have a cell phone? Why/why not?
- What are the physical effects of the earthquake? What are the emotional effects?
- What is a state of emergency? What agencies do you think would become involved in this situation?

Students read pp. 24–93 independently before the next shared session.

### Comprehension pp. 24–93

- Why do you think Maddy's family are sleeping in the lounge?
- What happens to the chimney? What do the bricks damage?

- Why do some of Maddy's neighbours leave?
- Why do Aunty Beth and Uncle Dave come to stay with Maddy's family?
- Why do Maddy's family have to boil their water when it comes back on?
- Why doesn't Maddy's mum want Jackson to watch the news?
- Why is everyone so amazed that no one died in the quake?
- What damage has Laura's house sustained?
- Why is Uncle Dave so angry about what has happened to his house? Why do you think he blames the council?
- What news does Maddy's mum learn on 7th September? How does she react to this news? What repercussions might this have for her family?'
- Why are people stockpiling groceries?
- Why is Maddy's dad working extra hours?
- What does a red sticker on your house mean?
- What good news does Maddy receive on the 11th of September?
- Why is Maddy so happy to get back to school?
- What does Maddy's mum decide to start doing from home?
- What do Maddy's parents buy her on the 18th of September? What made them change their minds? How does Laura feel about this?
- Why can't Maddy and Laura sing their duet at assembly?
- What does Jackson find exciting about going into town?
- How many aftershocks have occurred by the 6th of October?
- What good news does Miss Finch give Maddy on the 18th of October?
- What items do Maddy's family put in their emergency kit? Why does Maddy's mum insist that each child has their own backpack?
- Where does Maddy find her lunchbox? Who does she blame for the theft?
- What does EQC stand for? Why do you think Maddy's mum is arguing with them on the phone?
- Why does Maddy's mum get mad at her on the 12th of December? Is this fair? Why/why not?
- How does Maddy feel after she sings at assembly?

- Why will Christmas be especially hard for some families?
- How does Maddy feel when an aftershock happens at the mall? Why does it take her mum so long to get them home?
- What happened to some of the shoppers in town?
- Why is Auntie Beth so upset when she rings Maddy's mum?
- Why does Maddy love her new school so much?
- Where is Maddy when the massive earthquake occurs? What does she see? What does she hear?
- Who comes and collects Maddy from school? Why does it take them so long to get home?
- Describe what Maddy sees when she gets back home.
- Why is this earthquake more destructive than the September quake?
- What does Maddy and her family learn about the earthquake when the power comes back on and they can watch the news?
- Why do Laura and her family move to Timaru? How does her leaving affect Maddy?
- Why is it hard to accurately judge the death toll? Where did most casualties occur?
- What does Maddy mean when she says her family are in 'survival mode'?
- Why are Maddy and her family a lot better off than some people?
- Why can't Tessa return to her school?
- How many people are reported dead on March 1st?

### Discussion

- What examples of neighbours helping neighbours can you find in the novel? Why is it important that people pull together in a disaster? What contribution do the university students make?
- Why does the earthquake bring Maddy and her family closer together? Why do you think Jackson is the most traumatised family member? Why do you think Maddy's mum insists that Tessa accompany her everywhere?
- Why is tidying up after the quake such a huge job?
- What are some things that people can do to prepare for a disaster?
- Why does Maddy hate the aftershocks so much?
- What issues might a disaster as large as an earthquake provide for insurance companies?

- In what ways do the earthquakes and aftershocks affect Maddy and her family? How does her life change?

Students read pp. 94–159 independently before the next shared session.

### Comprehension pp. 94–159

- Describe Memorial Day.
- Why doesn't Maddy want her parents to know how scared she really is?
- Why does Maddy's mum get angry at Aunty Beth?
- What does Maddy mean by 'the new normal'?
- What does Laura think the best thing about living in Timaru is?
- Why is Laura's mum crying when she returns from their house?
- Where does Tessa have to attend school? How will she get there? Why won't she finish until 5pm? Why is Tessa so upset about this?
- Why does Maddy encourage Zoe to sing with her?
- Why do you think people are asked to sign pledges to remain in Christchurch?
- What does Zoe think Maddy's 'problem' is? Why does Maddy agree to sing with her?
- Why does Tessa hate her new school so much? Why isn't she looking forward to the holidays? How does Maddy make her sister feel better?
- What do Maddy and her friends do to make the aftershocks easier to deal with?
- Why is Maddy so excited about her visit to Laura's? What fun things do they do together? What realisation does Laura come to when she is in Timaru?
- How do Maddy and her family celebrate the royal wedding?
- What does Maddy mean when she says that everything about the earthquake is 'random'?
- Why does Maddy 'miss' her sister even though she's right in front of her?
- What is the 'Share an Idea Expo'? What does Maddy think that it will be impossible to please everyone?
- What famous person does Maddy see at the Telethon? What does Tessa say to Maddy to calm her down before she sings? How does Maddy feel after her performance?
- What exciting news does Maddy learn from Miss Broker on the 23rd of May?
- How does Maddy's mum reward Jackson for not wetting his bed?

- Why is everyone avoiding Tessa?
- Who is Maddy's new friend?
- Describe Maddy's argument with her sister. How does this help bring them closer together?
- What things does Maddy miss the most since the earthquake?
- Why is Maddy's house still cold despite the heat pump?
- Why does it take so long for repairs to be made to damaged houses?
- Why is the aftershock on the 13th of June so terrifying?
- Why does Maddy feel guilty?
- Why causes the fight between Aunty Beth and Uncle Dave?
- Why is Maddy surprised when Zoe texts her?
- How does Maddy feel about missing so much school?
- Why does Maddy find the weekends boring?
- What bad news does Maddy's mum give her on the 20th of June?
- Why does Zoe think that Alex might like Maddy? How does this make Maddy feel?
- How does Maddy feel when she sees all the snow? What does she see that symbolises hope?

### Discussion

- Who is Ken Ring? Why did he cause so much controversy?
- What lessons do you think Maddy has learnt from the earthquake? In what ways does her character develop and change as the story progresses?
- How does Maddy's relationship with her sister change after the earthquakes? Why do you think this is?
- How have some of the kids at Maddy's school been affected by the earthquakes? What might be some of the signs that they are not coping?
- Identify a main theme in the story and explain how it is developed by the author.

### Activities

**Research** – Choose an interesting aspect of the Christchurch earthquake to conduct a research assignment on. You may want to research the contribution of the university students, the damage to the CBD or heritage buildings, or the psychological effects of the quake. Formulate focussing

questions, come up with possible sources of information and record the research process. Present your information as a poster, in an essay or in a speech.

**Theme** – Many important themes and ideas are raised in this novel. Choose one theme and design a collage that depicts this theme. Include a quote from the story to help reveal your theme.

**Letter** – Write a letter to a friend explaining why this is an important novel to read.

**Review** – Write a book review suitable for publication in a school newspaper. Include a brief summary of *Canterbury Quake*. Explain the importance of the setting in the story and describe the main characters. Include information about the main themes and ideas presented in the story and give your personal opinion about the book. Why is it important to record historical events?

**Character** – Write a paragraph about how Maddy's character develops and changes throughout the course of the book.

**Family Relationships** – Describe Maddy's relationship with each family member. Who is she closest to and why? Who does she have conflict with and why does this conflict occur? Find evidence from the text to support your ideas.

**Poster** – Design a poster advertising the novel for your school library. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas. Include illustrations and images from the text to make your poster appealing and encourage others to read the book.

**Newspaper Front Page** – Design a newspaper front page for the day after the February aftershock. Include the date, a banner headline, articles and photographs.

**Writing** – Write a poem similar to Maddy's about the destruction of Christchurch or the power of nature.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd