

# My New Zealand Story – Harbour Bridge, Auckland, 1958–59

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### Synopsis

Simon lives in Auckland with his mother, father, older sister Linda and younger sister Joanne. The year is 1958 and Simon and his friend Marty have spent the whole summer outside swimming, fishing and building forts in the bush. Now it's time to go back to school and Mrs Hobson wants all the students in her class to keep a diary. For over a year Simon keeps a detailed diary about his life in New Zealand in the 1950s. Exciting changes are happening around him. The Harbour Bridge is getting closer to completion and soon Simon and his family will no longer be so isolated from central Auckland. The Space Race is on, rock and roll music is gaining popularity and the first supermarket opens. Auckland in the 1950s is an exciting place.

### Text Type

*My New Zealand Story: Harbour Bridge* is the latest in Scholastic's hugely popular My New Zealand Story series. Written in diary form, *Harbour Bridge* details the life of Simon, a typical young boy living in a middle-class family. The building of the Harbour Bridge is significant for Simon and his family because previously they had to travel to the city by ferry. Simon's uncle also works on the bridge and he and his mates often drop round for tea and cake, sharing stories about bridge design, accidents, construction and progress. Set in New Zealand in the 1950s, *Harbour Bridge* sends the reader to a more innocent time when doors could be left unlocked, there were no computer games or mobile phones and rock and roll was considered risqué.

### Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 9–24, 25–94, 95–165 and 166–233.

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 compare Simon'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, the blurb and the Historical Notes provided on pp. 234–269.

- This novel is written in diary form. What do you expect from a novel written in this way?
- When is the story set?

- Who does the diary belong to?
- Where is the story set?
- Have you ever been over the Auckland Harbour Bridge? If so, what are your impressions of it?
- Read the Historical Notes provided and study the photographs. What is the most interesting information provided about Auckland in the 1950s?
- What impact do you think the Harbour Bridge would have had on Auckland city?

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

### Comprehension pp. 9–24

- Describe what Marty and Simon do during their school holidays. Why do kids in Auckland get an extra day off?
- Where do Simon and Marty go to school? What is special about it?
- How does Simon feel about being asked to keep a diary?
- Why does Marty think that they are living through “exciting times”?
- What do we learn about Simon’s family from his diary?
- What is Joanne obsessed with?
- What is the Space Race?
- Which House is Simon in? Why is he pleased about this?
- Who is Emily?
- Why does Simon’s dad say that working on the Harbour Bridge must be like being at the United Nations?
- How did the carpenter die?

### Discussion

- How is Simon’s life in 1950s Auckland different from yours? What would you miss the most about life in the 21st century and why?
- Is it ethical to send animals up into space? Why/why not?

- What impression do you get of the safety rules and procedures surrounding the building of the bridge? How are they different from today?
- What do you think is going to happen in the story next?

Students read pp. 25–94 independently before the next shared session.

### Comprehension pp. 25–94

- Which war do you think Simon’s grandmother is referring to?
- What kind of bridge is the Auckland Harbour Bridge?
- Why were coupons used during the war?
- Why is using the ferry inconvenient?
- What is significant about the 19th of March?
- What shocking news does Linda find out about Elvis Presley?
- Why does Linda think her father is “square”?
- Why does Linda wish she lived in the city?
- Why does Simon like going on the ferry so much?
- Describe Simon’s visit to the zoo. In what ways is Auckland Zoo in the 1950s different from Auckland Zoo today?
- Why are some people on the North Shore unhappy about the bridge?
- Why is Jo upset when she learns that Sputnik returned to the earth’s atmosphere and disintegrated?
- Who does Linda want to go and see after she watches “Jailhouse Rock”?
- What information does Simon share with Emily about his mother and father?
- What does Terry do on the bridge? What are some of the dangers of his job?
- What will happen to the ferries after the bridge is completed?
- Why doesn’t Linda’s dad like her going into the city?
- What happened at Curries Milk Bar?
- Why do Marty’s mum and Simon’s mum take the car to Otahuhu?
- Describe Simon’s mum’s experience at the supermarket. What advantages do these stores have over the grocer’s?

- Who are Mia one and Mia two? How do Jo and her friends honour them? Who speaks at the funeral service?
- Which 1950s singer is Linda obsessed with?

### Discussion

- Little Rock is referred to in this section of the book. Using the internet find out why this place is significant.
- When talking about the animals in the zoo Simon says “It’s only a bit of fun” and Linda replies “For them or for us?” what do you think she means? What do you think we have learned about how to treat animals since the 1950s?
- What do Simon and Linda do for fun? How are their activities different from what you and your friends do today?
- Describe Simon’s relationship with Emily. How do you know he has a crush on her?

Students read pp. 95–165 independently before the next shared session.

### Comprehension pp. 95–165

- Why does it feel like Northcote “is one big, messy, dirty construction site?”
- Why is Marty’s space model a big hit at school?
- Why is Monday 18th August an embarrassing day for the Americans?
- Why is Linda jealous of Sally?
- Describe Simon’s dad’s parents. What tragedy have they endured? Why does Simon’s dad always visit his parents at the same time of year?
- Why is everyone looking forward to the bridge opening so much?
- Which toy is the latest craze in America?
- Who comes in to talk to Simon’s class about the bridge?
- What is operation Pickaback? Why is the timing of the operation so important?
- Why did Emily’s family move to New Zealand?
- What does Emily mean when she says to Simon “Your uncle works on the bridge too, as a labourer. At home we’d be kind of different, but here we’re not”?
- What happened to The Pioneer? What was significant about The Pioneer?

- Why does Jeff end up in the emergency room?
- Why does Simon's mum's friend think that "they have everything in America"?
- Why does everyone gather at the bridge on the 29th November? What goes wrong?
- Who does Simon think the bridge is being built for?
- Why is Linda upset when Simon fixes her dress? Why does Simon find sewing easy?
- Why do you think Kenneth thinks that "diaries are for girls"? Do you agree? Why/why not?
- When will Emily return to England? How does Simon feel about this?
- What is special about the satellite that is launched on the 22nd of December?
- Why do Simon and Jo sneak out into the garden in the middle of the night?
- What does Jo think is her best Christmas present ever?
- Why is Simon's Gran so opposed to the satellite?
- Why does Marty change his mind about being an astronaut? What does he want to do instead?
- Why does Simon think that it will be weird for Jeff when the bridge opens?
- Who is Simon's new teacher? What is unusual about him?
- What shocking news does Simon's mum receive on the 7th of February?
- Why does Simon feel like he's always waiting for something?

### Discussion

- Use the internet to find out what Simon means by "the Cold War".
- Why is Simon so surprised when his uncle reveals that he was "scared stiff" talking to his class?
- Hula hoops were a huge craze in the 1950s. What do young people play with today? In what ways have our lives changed with technology?
- Simon asks Marty this question about space travel: "Why do they spend so much money on something that's going to last for less than an hour?" Why do you think so much money was spent on the Space Race? Was this money justified? Why/why not?
- Simon and his friends are given polio booster shots. Use the internet to find out what polio is and the effects of the disease.

Students read pp. 166–233 independently before the next shared session.

### Comprehension pp. 166–233

- How are the Americans training their monkeys?
- Why is Simon’s dad so against Johnny Devlin?
- What concerns do Mr Grouch and his friend have about the bridge?
- Who keeps identifying Mr Allen’s quotes?
- Why doesn’t Simon want to move?
- What is Simon’s dad’s new job? Why is he so excited about it? What part of her father’s job impresses Linda?
- What celebrations are planned for the opening of the bridge?
- How does Linda react when her father refuses to let her see Johnny Devlin?
- Why does Uncle Alan get a £30 bonus?
- Why are Marty and Simon disappointed when they learn that two young ladies have already walked over the bridge?
- What realisation does Simon come to about Mr Grouch on ANZAC Day?
- Why are Emily and her family returning to England? How does Simon feel about this?
- Why are Marty’s parents considering moving to Takapuna?
- How long does it take the bus to get across the bridge?
- What does Emily give Simon on the last day of school?
- Why is the ferry so busy just before the bridge opens?
- What skills does Simon’s dad need to have to work on the bridge?
- Who does Linda finally get to see in town? Why doesn’t she want to wash her arm for days? How does Linda’s mood change after this?
- Describe Simon’s first walk over the bridge. Why do so many women have trouble walking over it? What can you see from on top of the bridge? Why does Linda liken it to “walking in the sky”? How many people walk across the bridge?
- Why is it so sad that a worker dies in the last week before the bridge opens?
- Why does Simon get a special trip across the bridge? What do the nurses in the hospital call him?

- How do Simon and Linda convince their mother that they should be allowed to watch the fireworks?
- Describe the opening ceremony for the bridge. Who gets to drive over the bridge first? What funny stories does Simon's dad tell him about his shift?
- Why does Able die?
- Who turns up to take Linda, Simon and Jo over the bridge?
- What do people miss about the ferries? What else changes for Simon and his family after the bridge is completed?
- Describe the control room on the bridge.
- What are some of the negatives aspects of working on the bridge?
- Why is Grandpa annoyed when he arrives for dinner on the 17th of August?
- What exciting news does Simon learn from Emily's letter?

### Discussion

- Describe the gender roles portrayed in the story. Why does Simon tell Jo that girls can't be astronauts? What does he think they should do instead? Explain how attitudes and gender roles are different in the 21st century.
- Do you agree with Simon when he says that engineers use facts AND imagination when they design bridges? Why/why not?

### Activities

**Research** – Conduct a research assignment about the Space Race or the use of animals in early space travel. Formulate 3 open-ended questions to guide your research. Use a range of verbal, oral and written sources to gather your information. Keep a log of what you have done and where you found your information. Present your findings as a poster, a report or an oral presentation.

**Character** – Compile a list of words from A–Z about Simon. These adjectives could describe what he looks like, how he behaves, his personality, his likes and dislikes or his relationship with other characters.

**Setting** – Write “Auckland in the 1950s” on one side of a sheet of paper. On the other side, write “Auckland in 2014.” Under each heading write down descriptions of what each setting is like, concentrating on comparing and contrasting how things have changed.

**Plot** – Make a timeline of important events in the novel in the order that they occur.

**Theme** – Identify an important theme or issue developed in the novel. Brainstorm about the theme and then display your ideas in a graphic organiser. Your graphic organiser should identify the issue or

theme, explain how the theme is developed in the story and include quotes from the text to back up your ideas.

**Static Image** – Design a static image that illustrates an important theme or idea from the novel. Use verbal and visual features to convey your idea. Include a written commentary that explains the theme that your static image depicts and the reasons why you chose to display your ideas the way you have.

**Writing** – Imagine that you are Simon’s sister Jo. Write a letter to the 1950s Auckland Zoo expressing your opinion about the chimp’s tea party.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd