

# Hero of the Hill

## Author: Joy Cowley

## Illustrated by: Philip Webb

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### Synopsis

Engine H One-Ninety-Nine worked on the Wairarapa line, pulling carriages up the steep incline of the Rimutaka Hill. It was a special kind of Fell locomotive, designed especially to go up steep inclines. Even in stormy weather and dangerous conditions, skilful drivers were able to get Engine H One-Ninety-Nine to the summit and deliver people and supplies.

Today the incline is a walking track and trains now travel in a tunnel under the hill. Fell engines are no longer needed and the last remaining model (H One-Ninety-Nine) is displayed in a Museum in Featherston.

### Text Type

*Hero of the Hill* is a delightful children's picture book which brings the now obsolete Fell engine back to life. Written by acclaimed New Zealand author Joy Cowley, the story is told in rhyme, creating a steady cadence which will appeal to young readers. Beautifully illustrated by Philip Webb, the story takes the reader on a journey through the Rimutaka ranges and explores the little known history of this coal-powered steam engine. A list of fascinating "Fell Facts" is included at the end of the story. All royalties from this book are being donated by Cowley to the Fell Locomotive Museum at Featherston.

### Introducing the Book

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

- Why do you think the book is called *Hero of the Hill*?
- Based on the illustrations and the blurb, where do you think this story is set?
- Look at the pictures and decide whether the story is set in the past or the present.
- Make a prediction about what the book will be about.

Teacher reads the book aloud. Students follow along in their own books.

- What is the name of the engine? What is special about it?
- Where does the engine do its work?

- Why do you think locomotive engines were important at the beginning of the 1900s and beyond?
- The author describes the mountainside between Summit and Cross Creek as “wild and bleak”. What does the word “bleak” mean?
- Why do you think the engine is able to get up the steep hill even in bad weather?
- The author describes the engine driver as “skilful”. What does this mean? Why is it so important that the driver is good at his job?
- What does the picture of Featherston suggest about when the story is set? Have you ever been to Featherston? In what ways is it different from the illustration?
- What is the train taking up the Rimutaka ranges?
- What do you think the brake-van might be?
- How do you think the train driver feels when he can’t see what’s ahead of him because of the bad weather? What are some of the potential dangers that could befall the engine?
- How does the engine run?
- What is the fireman’s job?
- Why is Siberia such a dangerous place? What difficulties does it present for Engine H-One-Ninety-Nine?
- How do the people at Summit react when they see the engine come through the tunnel?
- What do you think the signalman does?
- How are today’s trains different from H One-Ninety-Nine?
- What is the railway track used for today?
- H One-Ninety-Nine is the last Fell engine in the world. Where is it displayed?
- Look at the map at the end of the story. What do you notice about the new railway route compared to the old one?
- Read “A few Fell facts”. What 3 facts do you find the most the most interesting and why?

## Activities

- Write a letter to the author explaining what you liked about the story.
- Design a pamphlet advertising the Featherston Museum.
- Brainstorm as much information as you can about the setting of the story. Remember to write down information about where (country, town, geographic location) and when (year, season, time of day etc.) the action takes place.

- Choose 5 adjectives to describe engine H One-Ninety- Nine. Use each of these in a sentence.
- Write a paragraph explaining why is important to preserve elements of our past. What do you think we can learn from history?
- Imagine that the Fell engine has just been invented. Design a poster encouraging railway companies to buy it.
- Read “A few Fell facts” at the end of the story. Using a dictionary or the internet, compile a glossary of key railway terms and explain what they mean.
- Write a paragraph explaining why you think Joy Cowley wrote this book.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd