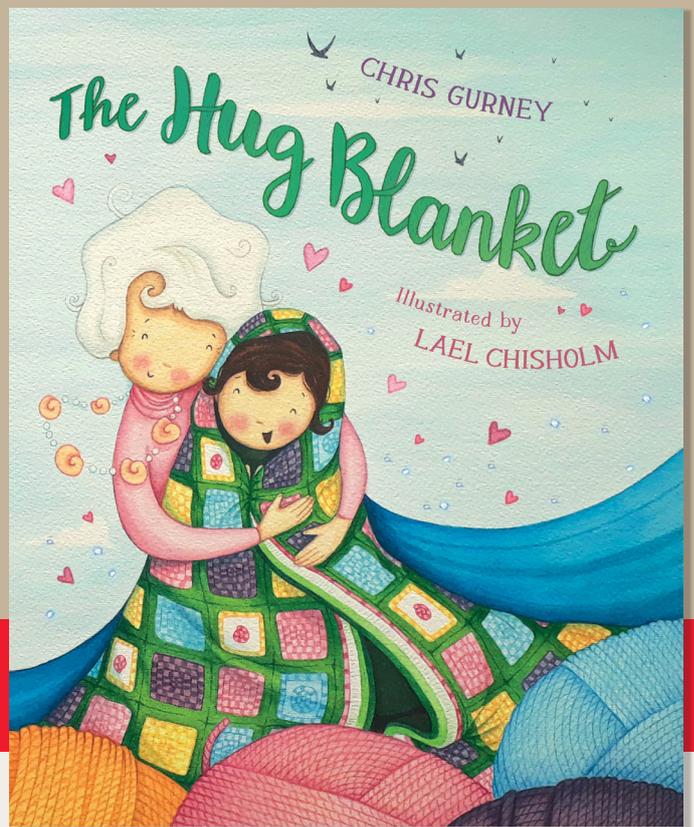


The Hug Blanket

By Chris Gurney

Illustrated by Lael Chisholm

• Reading • Writing • Health • Thinking Skills •



Māori edition available: **Te Paraikete Tauawhi**

Synopsis

A young girl and her little brother love to visit their nana. Nana bakes things with them, plays games and minds them while they swim on the beach. Afterwards, they collect shells and line the pathway to their nana's house with their treasures. Nana knits hug blankets for all the family and includes something special for each person on every corner. On the young girl's blanket, she knits shells.

One day the young girl's father tells her that Nana has died. They visit her house, remember the smell of hot buns from baking long gone, and collect shells to take home. After the funeral, the young girl hugs the blanket and cries. She realises it smells like sunshine, sounds like whispers, looks like rainbows ... and feels like love.

A few months later, the family visit Nana's graveside. The young girl reminisces about her nana, remembering her soft white hair, the flash of her rainbow skirts, her hugs and the sound of her voice. She misses her, but realises that Nana is still there inside her and will be forever.

About the Author

Chris Gurney lives in Warkworth and writes stories full-time. She especially loves writing in rhyme and rhythm, but with this new story decided to try something new. Chris Gurney's mother had recently passed away, and she wanted to write a story to commemorate the love her mother had given her and her grandchildren. Chris showed the story to her writing critique group, who loved the story straight away and encouraged her to submit it to Scholastic. Other books Chris has written include *Esau the Paw*, *Giraffe Attack!* and *Hester's Blister* along with 11 Kiwi Corker picture books.

About the Illustrator

Lael Chisholm had just left school when she won the 2017 Storylines Gavin Bishop Illustration award. Part of her prize was a commission to illustrate Heather Haylock's book *Granny McFlitter, the Champion Knitter*. The book shortlisted for the 2018 New Zealand Children's Book Awards and was a Storylines Notable Book.

Writing and Illustration Style

A charming, heartwarming 32-page picture book story about love, loss, and family. Written in first-person, past-tense prose from the perspective of a young girl reminiscing about her nana. The author uses time signifiers to move the story along: 'Last summer', 'One day...', 'After our walk ...', 'On the day of Nana's funeral...', 'When we got home...', 'A few months later...'. The text shows a range of short and long sentences with conjunctions and commas joining phrases together. She incorporates the senses throughout the story and uses signifiers so that children can easily identify them: 'It smells like sunshine', 'It sounds like whispers', 'It looks like rainbows', and 'It feels like love'.

The artwork is bright and colourful with text written in white spaces or over faded-out pictures. The artist has used several symbols throughout the book: daisies, shells, and squares (to represent the blanket) juxtaposed with curvy shapes (perhaps to represent the curves arms make when hugging someone). The faces are drawn with pared back semi-circles and dashes, yet hold considerable expression. This story would suit 4 to 6 year old readers and is available in English and te reo Māori.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

During the shared sessions, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions, inferences and relate to their own experiences. Read the passages aloud and have students read alongside or by themselves.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the cover and read the title.

- Where is this story set? How can you tell?
- What do you think a 'hug blanket' is?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- What do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?
- In pairs, students share a favourite activity they've done with one of their grandparents.
- Brainstorm different words for 'nana' (including across cultures).

Comprehension questions

- What does the first page tell us about the grandparent?
- What senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste) has the author used on this page?
- What activities did Nana like to do with her grandchildren?
- What sort of relationship would you say the girl and her nana have?
- What is the girl's brother called, and how old do you think he might be?
- In pairs, ask children to share what special symbol would be on their hug blanket.
- Why do you think Nana chose shells for the girl's blanket?
- Why do people say someone has gone to 'a better place' when someone has died?
- Can anyone see examples of alliteration (closely connected words start with the same letter) in the story?
- What treasures were on the stairs up to the house? Why were they significant?
- Where do you think the funeral might have taken place?
- Why do you think the illustrator has drawn daisies on this page?
- What does it mean when the text says the girl's 'eyes grew leaky' and her 'chest ached'? Have the children felt like this before? When?
- How does the young girl remember her nana with the hug blanket?
- How does each child show their love at the graveside?
- What does the young girl miss doing with her nana?
- How does the hug blanket connect her with her nana?



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: USING THE SENSES!

Ask the students to share some of the things they saw, heard or felt while listening to, or reading the story.

Next, ask the students to divide a piece of paper (or notebook) into four squares. Label one square 'See', another 'Hear', the third 'Feel' and the fourth 'Smell'. Students then use pictures and/or words to show what the young girl in the story sees, hears, feels and smells throughout the story.

Follow-up activity: Students write a 'Senses' square box for their last visit to their nana/grandma/kuia/oma. What did they see, hear, feel and smell while at their nana's house (or someone special)?

See	Hear
Feel	Smell

ACTIVITY 2: HUG BLANKETS

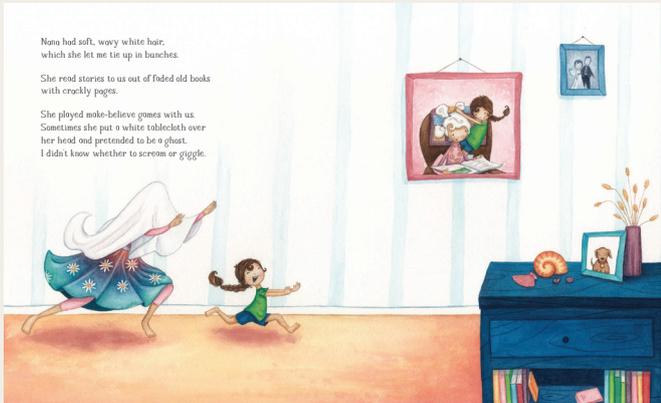
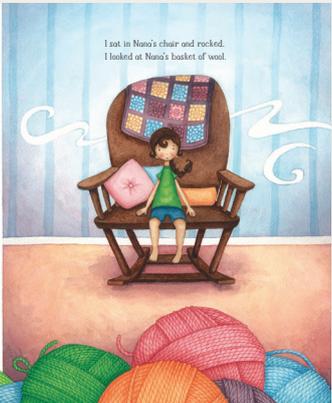
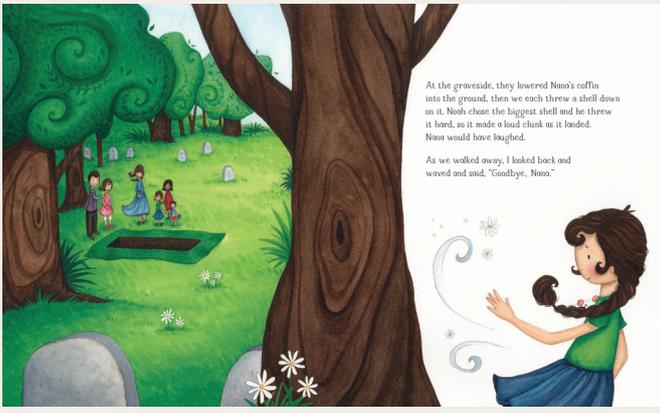
What was drawn on the hug blanket in the picture? What special picture did Nana draw/stitch on the corners of the young girl's blanket? Imagine your nana has made you a hug blanket. Draw a picture of what your hug blanket would look like. Draw in the corners something that is special to you.

Follow up activity: Take one square picture from each child that shows their special something/symbol, and put them together as a classroom hug blanket picture.

ACTIVITY 3: I CONCLUDE THAT!

Reread the story to the class. Stop at the three places that match the pictures on the chart below. For pages 4-5, ask, "What do you think the girl is feeling when she runs away from her nana?" On page 13 ask, "What is the girl feeling on this page?" On page 21, "How does the character feel now?" Extend the answers by asking 'how', 'why', 'what made you think that', and 'what did you see in the words and pictures that made you conclude/think that'.

I conclude that ...

<p>Nana had soft, wavy white hair which she let me tie up in bunches. She read stories to us out of faded old books with crackly pages.</p> <p>She played make-believe games with us. Sometimes she put a white tablecloth over her head and pretended to be a ghost. I didn't know whether to scream or giggle.</p> 	<p>One day, Dad told me that Nana had died suddenly.</p> <p>I didn't know what to do. Everything felt wrong. People said she had gone to a better place. I wondered how she could go to a place that was better than here with me?</p> <p>Dad and Mum took Noah and me to Nana's house at the beach. The house felt lonely and strange without Nana. I was sure I could smell Nana's fresh bread in the kitchen.</p> 	<p>I sat in Nana's chair and rocked. I looked at Nana's basket of wool.</p> 
 <p>At the graveside, they lowered Nana's coffin into the ground, then we each threw a shell down on it. Noah chose the biggest shell and he threw it hard, so it made a loud clunk as it landed. Nana would have laughed.</p> <p>As we walked away, I looked back and waved and said, "Goodbye, Nana."</p>		

Written by Maria Gill

