

# Mission Girl

By Fleur Beale

• Reading • Writing • Thinking Skills • Lexile: 520L •



## Synopsis

Ātāpo is only a very young girl when her tribe is defeated in battle. She is captured by the enemy and becomes their slave. Ātāpo is forced to work hard for the rival tribe and is too scared to run away because the penalty for attempting to escape is death. However, when an illness brought by the Pākehā strikes the village, Ātāpo is blamed by Ūroko, the chief's senior wife, and she must flee or be killed. Deeply distressed by the death of her mother

Ātāpo escapes to the mission station at Paihia. Ātāpo is a very bright girl and is extremely interested in learning. At the mission, Ātāpo is taught to read and write. She keeps a journal in which she details all of the events of her daily life, in addition to her thoughts and feelings about them. She also learns about her people and the threat that the Pākehā, who are eager to buy their land, pose to them.

A proposal is made to the Māori chiefs – sign the Treaty of Waitangi and the Queen will protect you and your land. Many chiefs agree but some refuse to sign the document. Against this backdrop Ātāpo continues to become educated and seeks desperately to reclaim her previous life as a chief's daughter. But the tribe she has escaped from still blame her for many deaths.

They want revenge and intend to kill Ātāpo. Will God and the people who do his work be able to protect Ātāpo from her enemies, or will she meet the same fate as the rest of her tribe?

## About the Author

Fleur Beale is a Wellington-based award-winning author who was born in Inglewood, Taranaki, on the farm where her father was born. Her father was a dairy farmer, her mother was a teacher and a writer. Fleur attended Victoria University in Wellington, followed by Christchurch Teachers' College, where she met her husband.

Beale's first stories were written for the children's radio programme, *Grandpa's Place*. Her first full novel, *Slide the Corner*, was published in 1993. Writing a novel taught her how to develop the plot and expand the characters and their intentions towards one another.

# Writing Style

*Mission Girl* is an interesting adventure story. It is set in New Zealand c 1840 and provides an accurate portrayal of how the Māori people of the Bay of Islands lived at this time. Young New Zealanders will find the historical details contained in the novel fascinating. The Treaty of Waitangi is the document that led to the birth of our nation and Ātapo tells her story against the backdrop of the document being presented to the chiefs and the discussions and events surrounding the signing of the Treaty. Ātapo is a likeable heroine who shows perseverance, courage and spirit. She experiences enough adventures and trials to keep even the most reluctant reader focused. The book is set out mainly in diary form and we are privy to

Ātapo's thoughts and feelings surrounding the events that she finds herself involved in. The novel contains some Māori words which are translated for the reader in the glossary at the start of the book.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

The novel can be covered in 4-shared sessions and 3 independent reading sessions. It has been divided up as follows: pp. 9-20, 20-70, 71-145, 146-192.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding. Have them discuss relationships between characters and the events that occur in the story. Have them identify the challenges that Ātapo faces and how she deals with them. Encourage them to examine how the character of Ātapo develops and changes throughout the course of the story. Students should familiarise themselves with the glossary at the start of the story.

### ASKYOUR STUDENTS:

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

- What time period does the story cover? How do you know?
- Where is Paihia?
- What year was the Treaty of Waitangi signed? Discuss what you already know about the Treaty with a partner.
- Who is the main character in the story?
- What is a mission station? Why does Ātapo go there?
- What does Ātapo learn at the mission station?
- What do you think is meant by Ātapo's destiny being "the guiding star of her people"?

Read the glossary at the start of the story.

Read the Historical Note (pp. 194-199) at the end of the story. In your books summarise the information contained here.

Teacher reads pp. 9-20 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

### Comprehension pp. 9–20

- Where have the tribe's warriors' gone?
- Where does Ātapo see her father standing?
- What is Ātapo supposed to do when she grows up?
- What does Mārama say before she leaves the Kainga? What do you think this vision might mean?
- What happens to Ātapo and the rest of her group before they reach their destination?
- What scene greets Ātapo when she returns to the pā?
- What does Ātapo learn about her mother at the pā?
- Where are Ātapo and her mother taken? What is Ātapo's role in the tribe?
- What is Ātapo's mother's name? What is the name of the chief's senior wife? Who is Tama?
- Why does Ūroko hate Ātapo so much? Why won't Ūroko's husband listen to her complaints about Kahu?
- Why does Kahu tell Ātapo not to join in the dancing?

## Discussion

- How do you think Ātapo felt when she returned to the pā and found out that many of her family, including her father, were dead? Why do you think her life was spared?
- Describe Ātapo's life with the enemy tribe. What is she expected to do?
- How does Ūroko pose a threat to her? How has being a slave changed Ātapo's life? How would her life have been different if she had remained in her own tribe?
- In what ways does Kahu show herself to be a wise woman? What advice does she give Ātapo?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read pp. 20-70 independently before the next shared session.

## Comprehension pp. 20–70

- Why have the visitors come to the village?
- Who is Āringa and why doesn't he agree with the marriage?
- What is the name of the man Ātapo was betrothed to when she was born?
- What information does Kotahi bring with him?
- What does Mārama tell Ātapo about her future? Why is Ātapo so disturbed by the vision?
- Why have the Pākehā visitors come to the village? Why is the chief wary of them?
- What does "Mr Pregnant-belly" do that insults the tribe? How do the tribe react to the insult?
- What does the man's son say that saves his father's life?
- What does the young man give Tama? What other gifts do the Pākehā give the tribe?
- What is wrong with Kahu? Why does the Tohunga tell Ātapo that she must move her mother out of the house?
- Why does Mārama insist that Ātapo leave the village?
- Where does she tell her to go? Why does Mārama believe that Ātapo will be safe on her journey through the night?
- Describe Ātapo's journey to the mission station.
- Who finds Ātapo and takes her to the mission?
- Why is Ātapo so astonished when Parata leads her through the village?
- How does Ātapo deal with her grief over her mother's death? Why do you think the Pākehā disapprove of this?
- What does Ātapo mean when she says "Fill the basket of knowledge"?
- Describe Ātapo's new dress. How does she feel about it?
- Why is Ātapo so surprised when she learns that everyone at the mission eats together?
- How does Mīria know that Ātapo is the daughter of chiefs?
- Why does Parata decide to take Ātapo to Paihia?
- Who does Ātapo believe has come looking for her? Why does she believe that this person is a threat to her?
- Who is the missionary at Paihia? Who does Ātapo live with there?

## Discussion

- What Māori beliefs and customs are shown in the novel?
- What difficulties does Ātapo have adapting to her new life at the mission? How is life at the mission different from life in the village?
- What aspects of her new life does she enjoy? What aspects of her old life does she miss the most?
- What do you think would have happened to Ātapo if the people at the mission hadn't taken her in?
- Describe Ātapo's character. What challenges does she face? What qualities does she exhibit? Why is she so eager to learn from the Pākehā?

Students read pp. 71-45 independently before the next shared session.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

## Comprehension pp. 71-145

- Why does Pari hope that the guests have already eaten? Why is Ātapo surprised by this remark?
- Where have the Pākehā visitors come from?
- Why do the Pākehā in Kororāreka behave so badly?
- Why does Ātapo ask Mata if she will kill the girls who have run away?
- Why does Ātapo believe that learning is her “duty”?
- Why does Mata try and deter Ātapo from leaving the mission village?
- What worries does Ātapo have for the people in her family? How do you think she feels being away from her tribe?
- Why is Ātapo so driven to learn how to write? What else does she learn while living at the mission?
- Describe Ātapo’s first experience of Sunday church.
- What is the name of Ātapo’s admirer?
- Why does Pari snap at Ātapo when she smiles at the sailors?
- What makes Ātapo decide that she will not go to the shipping and the sailors?
- How old does Mata Hēni think that Ātapo must be?
- Why do you think that young girls who marry get “old before their time”?
- Describe what happens when Hūkiki asks Te Wiremu for permission to marry Ātapo.
- Why does Mata believe that Ātapo is not ready for her own book? What does Pari suggest they give her instead?
- Name the ship that brings the letters to the mission.
- Why does Ātapo consider herself to be a person of “wealth”?
- What does Ngawa say to Ātapo that upsets her? How is Parata able to comfort her?
- Who offers to ask for news of Ātapo’s family? What information does he return with?
- Who comes in Muri’s place?
- What does Ātapo see in the water that makes her realise that the men in the boat have tricked her? How does she escape? Who does Ātapo call for help when she fears she may be drowning? Who rescues her?
- Why does Tōkia put a curse on Ātapo?
- Why does Ātapo want to be baptised?
- Explain how Mata deals with Tōkia when he comes to claim Ātapo.
- Why do you think that Ātapo is obsessed with clothes?
- Why does Mrs Brooks visit the mission?
- Why does Tuari decide to take the position with Mrs Brooks?
- Who is Te Matangi? How does Ātapo feel when she sees him?
- Why does Ātapo go to Paihia? Who is “the great chief of the queen from across the sea”?
- Why does Rēwiti forbid Te Matangi to marry Ātapo? What does Te Matangi say that gives Ātapo hope?
- What explanation does Tuari give to Ātapo for why there are so many people at church?
- What story does Tuari tell the girls about Mrs Blue-hat? What other exciting news does she have for them?

## Discussion

- Find examples of things that happen in the story that show the differences between the Māori culture and the culture of the Pākehā.
- Describe the people who take Ātapo in and look after her. Why do you think they show her such kindness?
- Many Pākehā who came to New Zealand were interested in buying land. What did they often give Māori in exchange for land? How does the Pākehā attitude towards land differ from the Māori attitude?
- How do you think Ātapo could use the knowledge that she is learning at the mission to help her tribe?
- Predict what will happen to Ātapo next.

Students read pp. 146-192 independently before the next shared session.



## Comprehension pp. 46-192

- Why is Ātapo worried about going to Waitangi? What does Ātapo promise Te Wiremu she will do at Waitangi?
- Why does Te Wiremu believe that the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi is important for the Māori people? How will the Treaty affect Ātapo's life?
- What curse does Tōkia put on Ātapo at the meeting? Why is Ātapo so adamant that her ancestors will save her?
- Who translates for the Governor?
- In what way does the Treaty protect the land of the Māori?
- Why do some chiefs disagree with the Treaty? What arguments are made by others to encourage them to sign?
- When was the Treaty of Waitangi signed?
- Why is Ātapo happy that so many chiefs have signed the Treaty?
- Why do the guns on the Governor's ship fire 21 times?
- What gift does Mata give Ātapo before her baptism?
- What news does Kotahi bring from Kaīnga? Why does this upset Ātapo?
- Name the ship that brings government officials and more Pākehā to New Zealand. Why are the Pākehā so angry when they arrive?
- How does Ātapo know that it is time to go home? What stops her from returning to her kin?
- How does Te Wiremu help gather more signatures for the Treaty?
- What skills does Ātapo learn that will be helpful for her and her triber?
- Why is Ātapo unwilling to be Te Matangi's second wife?
- Who attacks Ātapo on the beach? What words does he scream at her?
- Where does Ātapo get the courage to turn and face her attacker?
- What does Mata give to Ātapo the day that she leaves the mission?
- How does Ātapo make her way back to her people?
- Who does Ātapo see sitting by the fire? Why is she so surprised to see them? What are they doing there?
- What do the traders offer the Māori in exchange for their land? What does Okuru say to the people of Pitangi that convinces them to reconsider the Pākehā's offer?
- Why is Ātapo taking such a risk when she addresses Pitangi? What does she discover when she studies the agreement carefully?
- Why is Ātapo an honoured guest at the kaīnga?
- What reservations does Ātapo have about returning to her people?
- Why is Ātapo so confused when Mahara gives her the cloak to wear?
- Why does Rēwiti change his mind about Ātapo?
- Describe Ātapo's welcome back into her tribe. How do you think Ātapo would have felt at this moment?

## Discussion

- Describe the atmosphere in Waitangi in the days leading up to the signing of the Treaty. Why is Ātapo so excited about the event? How does she feel on Wednesday 5th February as she is standing outside Mr Busby's house?
- How do the Pākehā milling outside Mr Busby's house contrast with the Māori there? Find examples in the story that illustrate the Pākehā's attitude towards the Māori.
- Not all of the chiefs sign the Treaty. What problems do you think this could cause in the future?
- Describe Pari's attitude towards Ātapo. How does she treat her? Why do you think she feels this way about Ātapo?
- How will Ātapo's life back with her own people be different to life at the mission? Do you think that Ātapo made the right choice returning to her own people? Explain your answer.
- What issues are raised in the story? Are any of these issues still contentious today? Why do you think this is?



# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: RESEARCH

Conduct a research assignment on the Treaty of Waitangi. Formulate open-ended questions to focus your research. Use a range of sources to gather your information. Present your findings on a poster, as a speech, or in a power point presentation.

## ACTIVITY 2: STORYBOARD

Design a storyboard that illustrates 10 significant events that happen in Ātapo's life.

## ACTIVITY 3: ESSAY

Write a persuasive essay that explains the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi to New Zealand.

## ACTIVITY 4: DIARY ENTRY

Imagine that you are Ātapo. Write a diary entry for her one year after she returns to her people. Describe what has happened during that year and remember to include thoughts and feelings.

## ACTIVITY 5: PRESENTATION

Learn what is contained in the Treaty of Waitangi document. Summarise the contents into 10 main points. Present these points on your own treaty document, which you design.

## ACTIVITY 6: LETTER

Write a letter to a friend explaining why *Mission Girl* is an important book to read to learn about New Zealand history.

## ACTIVITY 7: NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Write a newspaper article that describes the events of February 6th 1840 and explains the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi. Remember to write in the inverted pyramid style, where the important details are given in the first paragraphs. Include quotes from people involved.

## ACTIVITY 8: POEM

Write a poem about Ātapo's life.

ACTIVITY 9: Poster – design a poster advertising *Mission Girl*. Your poster should be suitable for displaying in your school library.

## ACTIVITY 10: PARAGRAPH

Write a paragraph about an issue raised in the story and how it is dealt with in the text.

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