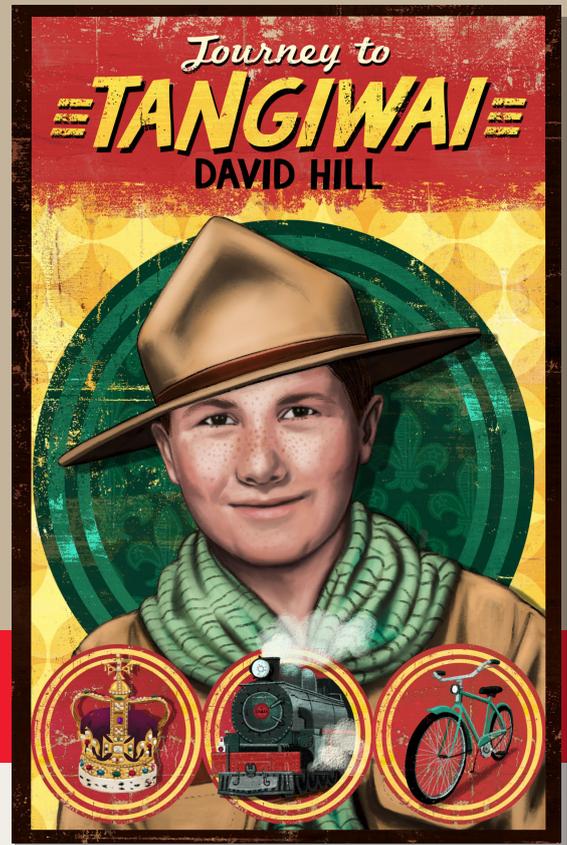


# Journey to Tangiwai

My New Zealand Story  
By David Hill

• Reading • Writing • Thinking Skills • Lexile: 660L •



## Synopsis

The year is 1953. Peter Cotterill starts the year writing in a journal given to him by his great-aunt. We follow him through a year of many changes as his small community struggles through hard times. He joins the local Scout troop and goes to the movies when he can and, through his paper-round, gets to read about the changes in a world still recovering from the effects of World War II and in love with science and technology. Within his family he has his father, a supporter of Queen and country, his mother, struggling to keep a job at the tobacco factory, and his uncle, damaged by the war and suffering from the effects of smoking at a time when the tobacco industry said smoking was good for your health.

The story culminates in a train ride to Auckland with his fellow scouts, supervised by his ailing Uncle, on the eve of Christmas. In the night, unbeknown to the travellers, a lahar washes away a railway bridge.

The Tangiwai Disaster on the eve of Christmas 1953, remains one of the major disasters in New Zealand's history. The newly-crowned Queen Elizabeth was visiting at the time and ultimately wrote to all the families involved, offering condolences.

The book includes photographs of the special events of 1953, including the site of the train crash and the funeral that followed.

## About the Author

**David Hill** is a prolific journalist and book author who was formerly a teacher for 14 years. His book-writing career began with *See Ya Simon*, now seen as a classic of children's literature. For Scholastic, his published list includes, *Fat*; *Four-Eyed*; and *Useless* (Winner Esther Glen Award), and the Storylines Notable Books; *Bodies and Soul*; *Sinking*; and *The Red Poppy*, among others. He has won almost every award available to a writer of children's fiction in New Zealand and is a respected reviewer of adult fiction. David was born in Napier and now lives in New Plymouth with wife Beth. They have two adult children. He was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) in 2004.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

## Before Reading

- On the cover we see Peter in his scout uniform, and the train that will feature in the story.
- Discuss with the class the concept of time passing and what they believe the world would have been like that long ago.
- From what have they drawn their knowledge? This could open up an interesting discussion of fictional stories shaping our knowledge more than facts.
- If Peter was 13 when he wrote this diary, how old would he be now? Are there people still alive who would've been Peter's age in 1953.

## During Reading

- Ask the students to take note of special events in Peter's life. What were his sources of entertainment? What was important to him?

## After Reading

- Ask the students to choose a certain period of time outlined in Peter's diary and keep their own personal diary for the same period. Compare the activities and interests.
- Ask the class to complete a timeline for 1953 using the diary and adding in special world events, or any events they can find specific to their own community.
- Using the timeline as a guide, suggest that some of the students put together a community paper with stories specific to 1953, including advertisements of the time. These can be researched at the local library or on the internet.
- Research the advertisements for tobacco at the time. What were the cigarette companies saying then about smoking? What do they say now?
- Ask a section of the class to complete a survey around the topic of smoking, such as: Do you approve/disapprove of smoking? Should smoking be totally banned? Report back to the class on the popularity or otherwise.
- In the story, Peter's mother is working at a tobacco factory. She begins to feel uncomfortable about her job. Ask the class to discuss all the elements of her concern and make a list of points for and against her staying in her job. Have a class discussion on the results.
- Peter is very involved in Scouts and describes some of the activities they get involved in. Using Peter's diary, and any other information they can find, ask the students to design a Scout poster on the topic of first aid.
- Are any of the students Scouts? Do they do the same kind of activities that Peter did?
- There is still a lot of memorabilia from the 50s. Suggest a '50s day in which the students bring along anything they can find from the era, including music, posters, books.
- The story culminates in a tragedy. Ask the students to see what they can find out about that event and write a news report that could have been used on the radio at the time.

