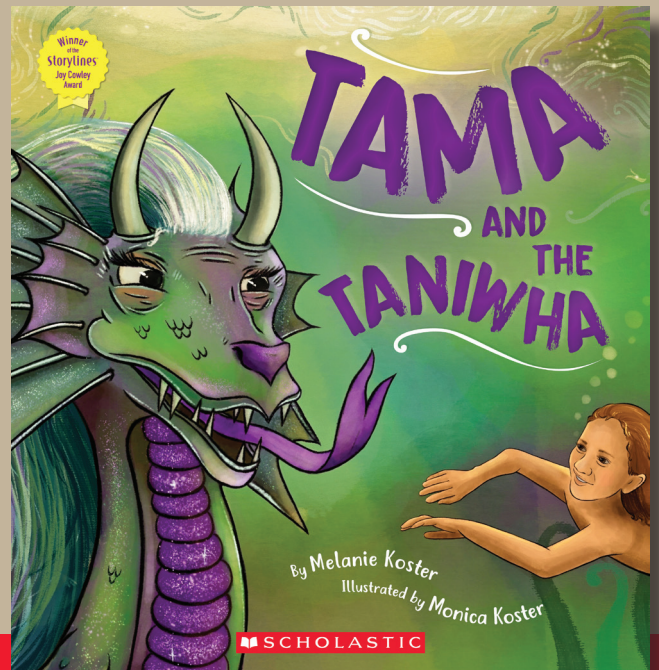


Tama and the Taniwha

By Melanie Koster

Illustrated by Monica Koster



- Reading • Writing • Maori • Mythical Creatures
- Family • Music • Art

Synopsis

Tama is down at the lake with his sisters and grandparents. When his sisters tease him about a taniwha being in the river, Tama hesitates to go in, and questions whether taniwha are real. His sisters keep teasing that the taniwha will nibble his toes and eat him.

Grandma is already in the water and encourages him to come in. As he wades deeper, his sisters keep telling him not to, saying that the taniwha is close by. Tama takes a deep breath and dives in anyway. While he is under the water, we see the outline of something – or someone (could it be Grandma?) – tugging at the toes of the sisters on their inflatables. The girls rush to shore in a panic, thinking there actually is a taniwha in the water.

Meantime, Tama meets up with his grandmother out in the lake and the two of them spend the afternoon playing in the water. Tama gains confidence, enough to start teasing his sisters to come back into the lake – but warning them that the taniwha likes big sisters the most!

About the Author

Melanie Koster was born on the wild West Coast of the South Island and was brought up in a book-loving, story-telling family. She lives in Ōtautahi, Christchurch with her whānau of artists, inventors and tinkerers.

Melanie is the author of two picture books, *The Reluctant Little Flower Girl* and *Milly Maloo and the Miracle Glue*, and has been shortlisted six times for the Joy Cowley Award, finally winning the award in 2022 with *Tama and the Taniwha*. Melanie works as a teacher aide at a local primary school, where she enjoys helping young writers hone their craft.

Tama and the Taniwha was inspired by the song ‘Don’t Put Your Waewae in the Water’ by Linda McGilvary

About the Illustrator

Monica Koster has loved drawing since kindergarten and hasn’t stopped since. She is now studying a Fine Arts degree at the University of Canterbury.

Monica’s paintings have been exhibited in Christchurch and Ashburton, as part of the Creator’s Room and ZONTA Female Art Awards exhibitions. When she’s not painting, she’s either running or making music. She plays the piano, alto saxophone, guitar and bass. Monica lives in Ōtautahi, Christchurch.



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Writing and Illustration Style

Tama and the Taniwha is a 32-page paperback picture book aimed at children in the 3+ age group. The author won the Storylines Joy Cowley Award in 2022, with this delightful story about a boy named Tama who spends the day at the lake with his three older sisters and grandparents. His sisters tease Tama, so the book begins with a phrase that is repeated throughout the story. However, each time, a different body part in te reo Māori is featured in the phrase, along with a helpful glossary at the bottom of the page. The text is written in the third person past tense, with dialogue between the characters. The book's themes include teasing, family fun and supernatural beings. The author uses rich language throughout, such as rhyming words and alliteration (words that start with the same letter sound). She takes the reader on a gentle journey, from when Tama is too scared to swim to when he gets the last laugh at the end.

The author's talented daughter has captured the essence of the story with her beautiful illustrations created using Procreate. Full-colour pictures, with a bold green and brown palette, feature on most double-page spreads and include scenes and plants seen throughout New Zealand. The type is set in Grenadine 17.5/27pt, with important parts of the story being set in larger type, on a curve or in different colours. The book is also retold in te reo Māori (*Ko Tama me te Taniwha*).

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Asking questions before, during and after reading is a great way for students to show their prior knowledge and understanding of what they have read. Read the story aloud, and have students read alongside you or follow along as you read. Use all or some of the questions below to help guide the students. Have them make predictions, inferences and connections based on their own lives and experiences.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the title.

- Where do you think the story is set? What clues are in the illustrations?
- What is a taniwha? Describe what the taniwha in this book looks like. What type of creature is it similar to?
- Who is Tama? Do you think he looks frightened of the taniwha? How can you tell?
- Read the text on the back cover. What does the word 'puku' mean?
- Why do you think Tama's big sisters try to scare him?

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

- Look at the title page. Would you feel scared if you met this taniwha while you were swimming? Why or why not? (title page)
- What is the meaning of the word 'waewae'? Point to the helpful glossary in the bottom right-hand corner of the page. Read the meaning of the word 'taniwha'. A 'spirit' is like a supernatural being. What does this tell you about the taniwha? (p.3)
- How is Tama feeling, compared to his three sisters? How does the illustrator show us that? (p.3)
- Would Grandad's reply to Tama's question make Tama feel better or more scared? Why does Tama need to be reassured that there is no taniwha in the lake? (p.4)
- Look at the type on this page. What is different about it? Why did the illustrator use different colours? (p.5)
- The author has used many interesting words. The words 'purple' and 'pointy' start with the same letter sound. What other words with the same letter describe the taniwha's tongue? (p.5)
- Can you find the rhyming words on the page 5? The words 'gnashing' and 'slashing' are rhyming words that describe the taniwha's teeth. Think about what a taniwha's teeth do. What other rhyming words could the author have used instead? ('crunching' and 'munching') (p.5)
- Why do Hinewai, Tui and Maia all tease Tama? Has anyone in your family teased you? How did it make you feel? (p.5)
- Why is Tama standing at the water's edge while his three sisters splash out into the lake? What does this tell you about how Tama is feeling? (p.6)
- The author compares the glassy surface of the lake to a freshly ironed tablecloth. What did she mean when she wrote that? (p.7)
- Read what Hinewai says on page 7. What does the word 'taunted' mean? Is she being mean or kind? (p.7)
- What does the word 'tucker' mean? Why does the author use two words that began with the letter t? (p.7)
- What does the word 'kai' mean? Check your answer at the bottom left-hand corner of the page. (p.7)
- What does the author compare Grandma's swimming costume with? What other thing could she have compared it with? (p.8)



- What do you picture in your mind when you hear the words ‘frothy splash’? (p.9)
- What important task did Grandad do? What clues in the illustration tell you that they will be at the lake a long time? (p.10)
- How does Grandad help Tama? (p.10)
- Tama wades in, up to his knees. What does this tell you about what kind of person Tama is? (p.11)
- Do you think the dark shadow is the taniwha? How do the sisters’ actions let you know that? (p.12)
- Predict what Tama will do next. (p.13)
- Were you right? Why do you think the words ‘little deeper’ are a bigger size? (p.14)
- Do you think the little blue fish would scare Tama? Why or why not? (p.14)
- What may have caused the ripple in the water? How does the illustrator show the ripple? (p.15)
- Besides animals, what else could brush against Tama’s leg in the lake? Look at the illustration for clues. (p.15)
- What do you think the purple colour surrounding the girls is? Who do you think caused it? (p.16)
- What is the meaning of ‘māhunga’? (p.17)
- Does Tama believe what his sisters are saying now? Why do you think that is? (p.17)
- Lizards often spread themselves out and lie in the sun to warm up. Why does the author refer to the sisters as lizards? (p.18)
- What is happening in the illustration? Who might be swimming upwards making that long trail? Why doesn’t the illustrator make it more obvious? (p.19)
- How do we know that one of the sisters is now scared? Find the text in the story to support your answer. (p.19)
- The author says that the sister thrashed about ‘like a tuna in a trap’. What picture pops into your mind? Have you ever felt something brush against you while swimming? How did you react? (p.19)
- The three sisters swim back to shore. Why doesn’t Tama return with them? (p.20)
- Grandad describes what he saw. What does it sound like? Then Grandad goes back to his book. Do you think Grandad thinks the taniwha is real? Why or why not? (p.21)
- How has the illustrator used colour to set the scene? Tama swims deeper into the lake. He follows the bubbles until he meets the taniwha. What do you think will happen next? Who is the taniwha? (pp.22–23)
- The three dots used in the text twice indicate a pause. Why does the author want you to pause? (pp.22–23)
- Grandma is the taniwha! Did you guess that? Do you think that Tama guessed that? Why or why not? (p.24)
- Have you ever done a tumble turn in the water? Who taught you to do it? Was it hard to learn? (p.26)
- Why do you think Grandma is strong enough to swim to the other side of the lake with Tama on her back? (p.27)
- Would you have liked to skip stones, float like starfish or listen to Grandma’s tall tales and terrible jokes? Why or why not? (p.28)
- How does the sisters’ teasing backfire on them? (p.30)
- How do you think the author is going to end the story? (p.31)
- Did you guess correctly? Did you enjoy the ending? What else could Tama have said to his sisters? How do you think Tama feels at the end of the story? Do you think the girls regret teasing Tama? (p.32)



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: SUPERNATURAL SUPERHERO

Some people believe that a taniwha has supernatural powers. In small groups, create your own taniwha. Discuss what your superhero taniwha looks like and write down what its superpower is. For instance, it might save people who get into trouble swimming. Maybe it can even grant a person a wish. Think about what Tama's wish might be.

ACTIVITY 2: ON THE BALL

Tama's three sisters floated on their inflatables on the lake. Work in groups. Each group has an inflatable beach ball and an erasable whiteboard pen. Divide the ball into eight sections. Write in te reo Māori the following words on the beach ball (one word per section): waewae, taniwha, kai, kumu, puku, mähunga, harakeke and tuna. Sit or stand in a circle and throw the ball to each member of the group. The person who catches the ball looks at the word that he or she sees first and says what the word means in English. Once everyone has had at least one turn, erase the words and put the following English words on the ball: toe, water spirit, food, bottom, tummy, head, flax and eel. Repeat the activity and have the students say the equivalent word in te reo Māori.

ACTIVITY 3: IN THE DEEP, DARK DEPTHS

On page 23, the taniwha can't be seen, but is lurking in the darkness deep under the lake. As a class, write what the taniwha would think of Tama if it saw him for the first time. Use language like the author used, such as rhyming words and words that begin with the same letter sound (alliteration). Alternatively, work in groups of seven and retell the story. Decide who is going to be each different character, such as Tama, the taniwha and so on. Use lots of expression when saying phrases such as "Don't put your waewae in the water, or the taniwha might get you."

ACTIVITY 4: SAY IT AND THINK IT

The three sisters taunted Tama because he was scared to get in the water. Reread what the sisters said to him on page 7, then draw three speech bubbles. A speech bubble contains words that are said aloud. Imagine that Tama's sisters encouraged him rather than teased him. Write what they might say to him in the three speech bubbles. Now make a thought bubble for Tama and write down what he might be thinking. A thought bubble shows what is happening in someone's mind and is not said aloud. Tama's sisters might be surprised to find out what Tama is thinking and feeling. Share your work with a friend.

ACTIVITY 5: TANIWHA TUNE

Some of the children may know the song 'One day a taniwha went swimming in the moana...'

Write the words on the board for everyone to see and practise singing it as a class. Ask the students to make up actions for each line, then try and write an extra verse to follow the first verse. Try and incorporate some reo Māori into the new verse, using the Tama book to help you.

ACTIVITY 6: TUATARA TO TANIWHA

Illustrators draw taniwha to look like lizards, tuataras, sharks or even dragons. Sometimes they combine elements from different animals to make up their creature. For instance, the illustrator of *Tama and the Taniwha* based some of her taniwha on the tuatara, which is a reptile found only in New Zealand. It has scales and spines running along its neck and back. Draw a taniwha by combining two or three of the above animals. Label your taniwha to explain where its body parts came from. Work alone or in pairs.

Written by Janine Scott



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