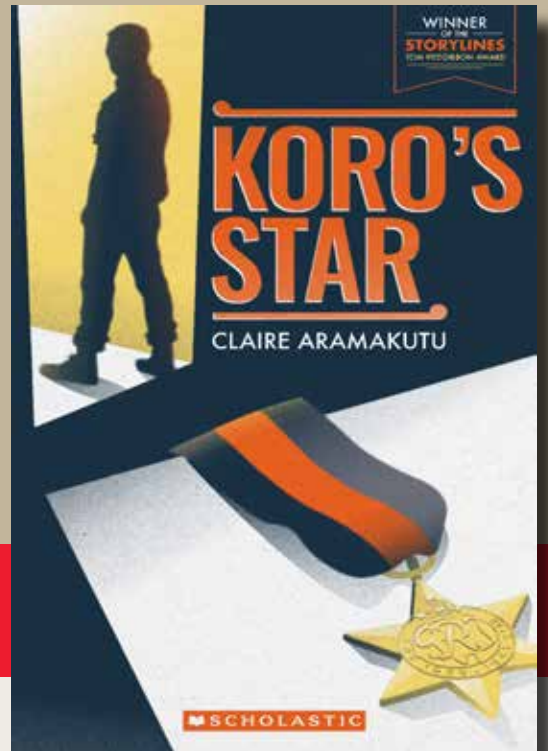


Koro's Star

By Claire Aramakutu

• Reading • Writing • Social Studies • History



Synopsis

It's the beginning of the summer holidays in 1967 when 10-year-old Atama moves with his family into a new army base. His father, Atama's hero, departs for Vietnam, asking Atama to look after his mum and his younger sister, Maia, while he's away.

Atama is nervous about making friends at the new camp, so his dad leaves a surprise under his pillow: Koro's 1939–1945 star medal, handed down to Dad after his own father died during World War Two.

Feeling braver wearing the medal around his neck, Atama finds what he is looking for: a group of kids who are willing to initiate him into their club. Atama completes a terrifying underground tunnel run to prove his worthiness to become a Fear Crusher. When personalities clash and cracks appear within the group, Atama is forced to question if the club is worth fighting for. His heart is tested when a new potential member of the Fear Crushers, Eden, becomes hurt and trapped in the underground tunnels. Atama leaps into action and descends into the tunnels, only to find trouble around every cold and dark corner.

A ghostly figure of Dad emerges and tests everything he believes to be true. With Koro's star hanging around his neck, Atama embraces its magic and strength, fights his way through his fears, and brings Eden safely to the surface. The weeks that follow are filled with uncertainty and pain, wondering why he saw Dad as a ghost in the tunnels. Did that mean he was dead?

When Dad returns home unexpectedly, Atama is overcome with relief. Dad believes everything Atama tells him about the tunnel and reveals a photo of Koro – who is the spitting image of Atama's dad. Dad explains how special Koro's medal is and how it had once guided Dad too.

About the Author

Claire Aramakutu's passion for writing began with a love of reading. From the age of ten with a torch in hand, Claire would hide under her bed covers and read in secret late into the night.

In her late twenties she decided to take writing seriously. During her subsequent time at Massey University, she won seven excellence awards, completing Graduate Diplomas in Media Studies & Creative Writing. She has self-published three books in the Loopy Lucy Series and a stand alone book: *Zombie at Number 56*. In 2023, Claire won the Storylines Tom Fitzgibbon Award for an original junior novel manuscript.

Claire lives in the South Island of New Zealand with her husband, four children and two cats who closely supervise Claire while she writes.



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Writing Style

Koro's Star is a novel written for the 9+ age group and is set in 1967 at an army base in New Zealand. The captivating story is written in the third person past tense, with dialogue between the characters in present tense. The author explores themes such as bullying, acceptance, friendship and family ties.

The main character is a boy named Atama who hopes his koro's World War Two star-shaped medal will give him guidance and courage as he tries to make friends and join the Fear Crushers club. Some historical and geographical references are woven into the story, such as information about World War Two, the 28th Māori Battalion and the island of Crete, in Europe. The letter to Atama from his father, who is stationed overseas during the Vietnam War, is written in present tense and provides a snapshot of life in Vietnam, from the climate and terrain to the people and food. Divided into 20 chapters, the book is a heart-warming tale with a touch of the supernatural running through it.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Questioning helps readers comprehend what they are reading. Good readers make connections, visualise, make predictions and infer. Making connections helps students relate the book's events to their own lives and experiences. Visualising helps them create pictures in their minds as they read. Making predictions helps them anticipate what they are about to read based on their own personal experiences, as well as information in the text. Inferring helps them read between the lines and draw conclusions. Asking questions before, during and after reading is an essential comprehension strategy that helps students become lifelong, competent readers. Encourage the students to discuss the book's themes and how the themes develop throughout the book.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the text on the back cover. Then read the paragraph on the front endpaper.

- What is the word 'star' in the book's title referring to?
- Who might the person on the front cover be?
- What do the dates on the medal relate to?
- How does moving from army base to army base make it difficult to have friends?
- Is someone in your family your hero and best friend? Who and why?
- What is the purpose of the text on the endpaper?

COMPREHENSION:

- Why do you think the author dedicates the book to those who serve, past, present and future? (p.7)
- Why is Atama playing war games with his little sister rather than playing with children of his own age? (p.11)
- Why does Atama divide the bedroom in half using a skipping rope? (p.12)
- During the Vietnam War, the people of Vietnam were divided. What kinds of things can divide a country? (p.14)
- Do you agree with Dad when he says, "War is never fair..."? Why or why not? (p.16)
- Do you think Dad should have promised Atama that he would come home? Give a reason for your answer. (p.17)
- Do you think the children of military personnel might play differently than other children? Explain your answer. (p.18)
- Dad tells Atama that it's okay to be sad and cry. Why is this good advice? (p.24)
- If you had to leave your family to go to war, would you slip away without saying goodbye one last time? Why or why not? (p.28)
- Why is Atama scared to make friends? Have you ever felt that way? How did you overcome it? (p.32)
- How would you feel if you lost your favourite marbles (or a favourite toy) during a game with some potential friends? Would it be worth it in order to make new friends? Explain your answer. (p.37)
- In order to win, Jace jams his knee into Atama's stomach. What does this tell you about the kind of person Jace is? (p.39)
- Do you think Atama means it when he says that he will see Jace, Benny and Heera tomorrow? Why or why not? (p.42)
- Do you think it's wise for Atama to take Koro's medal with him when he goes to make kites with Jace, Benny and Heera? Explain your answer. (p.48)
- Why does Benny go still and Heera feel nervous when Atama says that Jace can't have Koro's medal? (p.50)
- What does Atama mean when he says, "I got a bit unglued"? (p.52)



- Why does Atama tell his mother that he made ‘one or two’ friends? (p.52)
- What does a ‘package deal’ mean? Use the context of the sentence to help you. (p.54)
- Why does Atama think that Jace appears shorter and quieter today? (p.54)
- What is an ‘initiation’? Have you ever taken part in an initiation? If yes, how did it go? (p.55)
- Is Atama likely to tell someone about his secret club mission? Why or why not? (p.58)
- How has Jace’s dad influenced Jace’s behaviour? (p.64)
- Who do you think is whispering Atama’s name? (p.66)
- What words does the author use on page 72 to let you know that Atama likes Eden? (p.72)
- What might Eden mean when she says “My family is a bit different now”? (p.77)
- Why does Atama feel more at ease around Eden than the members of the Fear Crushers? (p.78)
- Why does Dad say that shadow puppetry has come in handy in Vietnam? (p.85)
- Dad wants Atama to be brave and strong. How can you be brave and strong in your everyday life? (p.86)
- Jace says to Eden that her family is not a military family now. Why is this a hurtful thing to say? (p.96)
- If Atama told Eden about the initiation beforehand, do you think she would have gone ahead with it? Explain your answer. (p.99)
- How would you feel if you had to go into the tunnels on your own? (p.101)
- Jace is the leader of the Fear Crushers. Should he be able to make up or change the rules without consulting the other members of the club? Why or why not? (p.103)
- Why might Blaze no longer be bothered by the crunching leaves and breaking twigs? (p.104)
- Where do you think the muffled scream is coming from? (p.105)
- What is the rumbling under Atama’s feet? Is it real or is he imagining it? (p.105)
- How would you feel if you saw the rabbit shadow on the wall? What message is it trying to tell Atama? (p.113)
- A chill swamps Atama’s body when the shadow motions him forward. Have you ever felt a chill run through your body or had goosebumps? What caused that to happen?
- The soldier has the name Pahere, but the man looks different from Dad, and exhausted. Who is he then? (pp.113–114)
- Do you think Atama is correct when he thinks that his dad is never coming back? Explain your answer. (p.115)
- Are you surprised that Benny goes back to check up on Eden and Atama? Why or why not? (pp.116–117)
- Atama, Eden and Benny could all hear the distant wailing of a woman. Who do you think she might be and why is she wailing? (pp.118–119)
- Why is Eden’s mum both angry and worried when she sees Eden? (p.122)
- Do you think Atama feels better after sharing all that happened in the tunnel with his mother? Explain your answer. (pp.123–125)
- How would your family react if you had gone to the tunnels at midnight without permission? Do you think Atama’s punishment is fair? Why or why not? (p.126)
- How might writing in his journal help Atama? (p.127)
- Why does Atama think that he will not need his journal again? (p.127)
- Have you ever had to wait patiently for something really important but still carry on with normal everyday life? How do you think Mum is feeling? (p.128)
- Why do you think Atama wants to return to the tunnels? Do you think he feels closer to his dad there? Explain your answer. (p.129)
- Why does Jace not tell Atama who his visitor is? Do you think that he is jealous? Why or why not? (p.131)
- Who do you think the man in the black car is? Mum is frozen to the spot. Do you think she is worried or relieved and thankful? (p.131)
- What does the strip of coloured ribbons tell us about this person? (p.131)
- Both Jace and Eden saw Atama’s dad return. Jace has a father, but Eden does not. How do you think each of them feel when they see Atama’s dad return safely? (p.132)
- Atama realises how lucky he is to have a father and one who encourages and supports him. How does it feel to have someone in your family, or a friend or teacher encourage and support you? How do they support you? (p.132)
- Why does Dad just nod and smile when Atama tells him about seeing the soldier in the tunnel? Why does he believe Atama? (p.134)
- Is it comforting to know that our loved ones are always near if we need them? Why? (p.135)
- Have you ever had a dream in which someone you know has come to you and given you a message? How did you feel when you woke up? (p.136)
- Why might Jace have started hanging out with older kids? (p.137)
- Jace bullies others during the story and feels big and important. However, towards the end, he loses his power over Atama and the others, so he feels sad and alone. What does this tell you about bullies? (p.139)
- Atama lets Jace wear Koro’s star. Why is Dad so proud of Atama for doing that? (p.140)



Activities

ACTIVITY 1: MILITARY MEDAL

When Atama's dad leaves for Vietnam, he places Koro's star-shaped medal under Atama's pillow. Koro, who was a member of the 28th Māori Battalion, was awarded the medal after he died while serving in World War Two. The medal is THE 1939–1945 STAR and has a navy blue, red and sky blue ribbon. Military medals are awarded for bravery, service, sacrifice or outstanding achievements. Medals are usually made from metal, such as gold, silver or bronze. They are mostly round or shaped like stars. The colours on the ribbons represent many different things. Sometimes the colours can represent natural features such as green for jungles and blue for the sea. The colours can even represent things such as night bombing and searchlights. The front of a medal may feature designs such as wreath or an image of the King or Queen of England. The back of a medal may feature the recipient name, rank and number.

Design the front and back of a military medal and its ribbon. Then label your design. Explain what the colours of the ribbon mean and describe the different features on the front and back of the medal.

ACTIVITY 2: A MAP AND CLUES

At the entrance of the tunnel, Jace hands Atama a map, which will help him find his way through the maze of tunnels. To pass the club initiation, Atama has to use the map to explore the tunnels. Jace, Benny and Heera tell him that he has to go to the end, but don't say exactly what to do once he gets there. All Benny says is, "You'll know."

Create your own map of the tunnels for Atama. Write clues to help him know what to do. For example, if you want to make up a clue for 'coal', then you could write: *I'm a lump and can make steam trains go.* Your clues need to help Atama know exactly what Jace, Benny and Heera expect him to do, which is write his name under their names on the tunnel wall with coal and then bring the coal back with him.

ACTIVITY 3: A JOURNAL FOR DAD

Atama's father wants Atama to write down the things that he wants to share with him when he returns from Vietnam. When Atama is in the tunnel by himself, he is overwhelmed by the deafening racket of gunshots and explosions all around him.

Write a journal entry about the unexpected supernatural experience that he has. Have Atama explain what he sees, hears and smells to his dad. Write the journal in first person past tense using informal language.

ACTIVITY 4: BE BULLY FREE

A bully is often unhappy, so he or she takes it out on someone else. Jace bullies Atama because he sees something that Atama has that he doesn't – a strong and loving bond with his father. Atama's father always encourages Atama. For example, he encourages him to make friends while he is away in Vietnam. However, Jace's father puts him down and says hurtful things to him all the time. For instance, he thinks that Jace is not tough enough to play rugby.

Imagine a scenario at school in which a bully calls you names. Write in three speech bubbles what you could say to him or her as a reply. Then write in three thought bubbles what you think you should *do*, such as walk away and tell an adult, ignore the bully and walk away, keep your cool and stay calm.

ACTIVITY 5: A FEELINGS DIARY

You experience many different emotions every day, especially if you are being bullied. You might feel sad, hurt, angry, scared, confused, worried and anxious. Track your feelings and emotions in a feelings diary. Your diary will help you think about and track how you feel throughout the day when you are doing different things, such as going to school, doing a boring chore, attending an after-school activity, going to a party and so on. Keep your diary for a week. You may feel a range of emotions, from happy to sad to angry. If you are comfortable about doing so, share your diary with a friend.

ACTIVITY 6: JOIN THE CLUB

Atama wants to join the Fear Crushers that Jace, Benny and Heera belong to. However, in order to do that, he must take part in the club's initiation. Work in pairs. Imagine that the kids in your street or your friends at school want to start up a club. Design a poster that features the name of your club, what the club does and who can belong to it. Lastly, point out what your club initiation task is. Remember to ensure that it is safe and legal. You might start a Kindness Club, and your initiation task is for the person wanting to join is to say one nice thing about each member of the club. Or you might start a Photography Club, and the initiation task is to take a photograph of an animal looking cute or doing something funny.

Written by Janine Scott



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