

My Family Tree, My Whānau and Me

By June Pitman-Hayes

Illustrated by Minky Stapleton

Māori lyrics by Kawiti Waetford



- Reading • Writing • Te Reo Māori • Art
- Song and Dance

Synopsis

In *My Family Tree, My Whānau and Me*, we are introduced to a range of children who tell us something about their family trees – a literal tree that is special to their family, with a nod to their generational family tree.

We meet a predominantly red-headed family that adores their big shady tree, an immigrant European family that cherishes their olive tree, a collection of Kiwi kids who love to play in a spreading pōhutukawa, an Asian family with their blossom tree, an ethnically diverse community who live in apartments around an apple tree, and a Māori family that reveres their grove of giant ponga.

And they all come together to sing and dance, swaying their bodies, in celebration of their whānau, friends and unique family trees.

About the Author

June Pitman-Hayes is a creative writer, singer-songwriter/lyricist and published poet and short story writer. Of Te Tāwera o Ngāti Pūkenga, Te Parawhau ki Patuharakeke, Ngāpuhi, and Ngāti Maniapoto descent, June is a well-known jazz singer and is the musical voice to Joy Cowley's *Hush: A Kiwi Lullaby*. She is the author/musician of a number of Scholastic NZ titles and lives in Tai Tokerau, Northland.

About the Illustrator

Minky Stapleton is a multi-faceted illustrator with a range of styles, all with a heavy dash of dark humour. An award-winning Art Director and Creative Director from Johannesburg, Minky threw it all in to follow her first love, illustration. She now resides in Auckland, where she balances illustration projects with running classes for kids on how to design scary monsters.

About the Translator

Kawiti Waetford of Ngāti Hine, Ngātiwai, Ngāpuhi descent, is a highly acclaimed opera singer known for his emotive performances. He's a versatile artist and Reo Māori expert. He's performed with prestigious orchestras and collaborated with luminaries like Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. A recent highlight was voicing Kristoff in Disney's *Frozen* Reo Māori. Kawiti lives in Kerikeri, Northland.

Writing and Illustration Style

My Family Tree, My Whānau and Me is a 32-page paperback book written for children aged 3–7. It's a fun song-story about family trees (actual trees) and how important they are to you and your whānau. Written as a song that is available for downloading, the story features rhythm, rhyme and repetition, so is a fantastic read-aloud and sing-along experience. The story is told and sung both in English and te reo Māori. Singer-songwriter June Pitman-Hayes celebrates trees, children, families and diversity in culture with her catchy, easy-to-sing words, while her playful, expressive voice brings the essence of the story to life in both languages. This book, while ideal for children and whānau of Aotearoa New Zealand, has a universal message for all to enjoy.

Minky Stapleton created the artwork using Adobe Photoshop and Procreate. Her charming illustrations are a wonderful blend of colour, movement and humour. The pictures are a mixture of full bleed and cameo style and capture the joy that both trees and dance bring children. Minky, an immigrant to New Zealand herself, showcases some of the different cultures that make up our communities. She uses a rich palette throughout, with strong focal colours for the different species of trees, such as pink for the cherry blossom tree and red for the pōhutukawa tree.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Read the book aloud and, if appropriate, have the students read (or sing) alongside or by themselves. Use the following questions for discussion, comprehension checks and making connections with the students' personal lives, experiences and prior knowledge. Talk about the different species of trees and what makes each one special.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- Look at the children. How can you tell that their families might have come from different parts of the world at one time?
- Have you heard the word 'whānau' before? What does it mean?
- How does a tree keep you safe from the burning sun? What else do trees help us with?
- Do you enjoy climbing trees? Why or why not?
- Look at the green musical notes and the dancing children on the title page. What kind of book do you think this might be?
- Download the song and listen to it in both languages.

COMPREHENSION:

- Read the author's dedication to Jamie on page 2. Why might she want children to discover magic while aloft in that old pōhutukawa by the sea? (p.2)
- The boy talking to the group has orange leaves on his clothes and he's holding up orange leaves too. What time of year do the leaves on some trees turn orange? (p.3)
- Why do trees need roots under the ground? What parts of a tree grow above the ground? (p.3)
- What do you notice about the words 'round' and 'ground'? Explain that rhyming words are words with the same ending sound. Ask the students to watch out for other rhyming words in the book. (p.3)
- The author used the words *feet*, *arms* and *fingers* to describe the tree. How are branches and leaves like arms and fingers? (pp.3–4)
- The illustrator has drawn some plump birds in the tree. Do you know what kind of birds these are? What other kind of creatures hide in trees? (p.4)
- The children helped to build a treehouse on the branches and played among the leaves that had fallen on the ground. Have you ever built a treehouse with your family? If so, what was it like? Have you had to sweep up leaves that have fallen down in autumn? What did you do with all the leaves? Why was this tree in the story important to the people in this community? (pp.4–5)
- What part of the tree is a 'bushy crown'? Why is it called a crown? (p.7)
- Why was placing a swing and a park bench under the tree a good idea? Why do people often have their picnics and parties under a large tree? The tree on pages 6–7 is very tall and wide. What does this tell you about its age? (pp.6–7)
- The text says that a tree grows a body just like you and me. What part of your body is like the trunk of a tree? (p.8)
- What makes a tree sway from side to side? What parts of a tree sway in the wind? What kinds of trees are very bendy during tropical storms? Why are they like that? (pp.8–9)
- What do you notice about the two olive trees on page 10 and how the people are dressed at the top of the page? What are the author and illustrator trying to convey? (p.10)



- Why is the bark of a tree hard? What is the bark designed to do? How is bark like our skin? How are they the same and different? (p.10)
- On page 11, four of the characters are carrying green bags full of olives. Why is an olive tree important to this family?
- How else could the family have used the olives from the olive tree? (p.11)
- Do you know any trees that have been in the same family for generations, or do you have a special tree at your place from which you gather food? What could the family do if they had too many olives for themselves? (pp.10–11)
- Have you seen a tree by the sea with red flowers and long, droopy tendrils? What is the name of the tree? Have you played in trees like that? What special time of year do these trees have their red flowers? (pp.12–13)
- What else could the children pretend to be in the ‘hairy armpit tree’? (pp.12–13)
- The tree on pages 14–15 has pink blossoms in spring. Have you ever seen people celebrating around cherry blossom trees in spring? Which country is famous for its cherry blossom trees? What other trees have pink blossoms during springtime?
- Why is spring often a time that people feel happier and like to go outside in the fresh air? How would the area under the tree smell as people walked all over the pink blossoms? (pp.14–15)
- On pages 16–17, what did the children share in common?
- Have you ever grown an apple tree or another kind of tree from a seed or seedling? How long did it take to grow? (p.18)
- Do you have a community garden near your home or school? Where is it and what kinds of plants and trees do you grow? (p.19)
- Why would growing an apple tree be a sensible thing to do? What other trees could you grow to help feed your community? An apple tree helped to feed the community in the story, but what else did it do? (p.19)
- Ponga are tree ferns that are found in New Zealand. They often live in forests and like shady conditions. Have you seen them growing in a forest? Where did you see them? (p.21)
- What do the words ‘Koro’ and ‘Kuia’ mean? (p.21)
- What is a clan? What other words mean ‘clan’? (p.21)
- Look at all the people dancing and enjoying themselves with their families. Does your family get together and have fun among the trees? What do you do, where do you go and what kind of trees are they? (pp.22–23)

See **ACTIVITIES** on the following page.

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: TREES ARE SPECIAL

Different types of trees are important to different families and communities. Choose a tree from the book and write three things that make it special to you and your family or community. It might be the way it looks, the way you interact with it or even its name. If the tree that is special to you doesn't appear in the book, then write about your tree instead.

ACTIVITY 2: THE HAIRY ARMPIT TREE

On page 13, the droopy tendrils that hung from the tree reminded the child of hairy armpits, so the tree became known as the 'hairy armpit tree'. Pretend you're a pirate who sailed to a faraway land and saw the hairy armpit tree for the first time. Draw yourself as a pirate. A speech bubble contains words that are spoken aloud. Using three speech bubbles, write three things you said to your pirate mates about the unique tree.

ACTIVITY 3: APPLE TREE ART

Some trees, such as olive trees and apple trees, provide you with food to eat. The tree on pages 18–19 is a large apple tree. The children climbed the tree to pick all the juicy red apples.

Draw the apple tree and its red apples using acrylic paints, a paintbrush, cotton balls and a bottle cork. You will need red paint, blue paint, black paint and three different shades of green paint. You will also need a paintbrush and a paint palette.

Firstly, paint the blue sky background and let it dry. Then paint the black trunk and branches and let it dry. Then dip a cotton ball in the darkest shade of green paint and create the foliage for the apple tree. Then, using a new cotton ball, paint the next lightest shade of green on parts of the green foliage. Now, apply the lightest shade of green paint using a new cotton ball. Once dry, dip one cork end into the red paint and dot red apples all over the green foliage.

ACTIVITY 4: SING AND DANCE ALONG

Download the song and listen to June Pitman-Hayes sing it in both languages. As a class, practise singing the song too. Look at the text and the dance moves of the children on pages 8–9, 16–17, 22–23, 26, 29 and 32. Practise those dance moves. Then perform the song and dance to another class or at a school assembly.

ACTIVITY 5: A WORLD OF TREES

Prior to the lesson, draw a simple map of the world on a large sheet of paper. Show the class pictures of about five or six unique trees that live in different parts of the world, such as baobab trees in Africa, ginkgo trees in China, Joshua trees in Mexico, rainbow eucalyptus trees in the Philippines and so on. Talk about what the trees look like and where they are found in the world. Divide the class into groups and assign each group one tree to draw. Once the drawings are finished, use string and drawing pins to go from each tree drawing to where the trees are found on the world map.

ACTIVITY 6: MY FAMILY TREE

In this book, the family trees were actual real trees. However, the term *family tree* can also refer to a visual diagram that shows all the people in a family over many generations. It describes their relationship to one another, such as a brother, sister, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, cousins and so on. These charts often resemble the shape of a tree, with it being wider at the top. The older generations are at the top of the tree and the younger ones at the bottom. Draw your own simple family tree on a sheet of paper. Start with yourself at the bottom of the tree and include other members of your family, such as your parents, siblings and grandparents. You may have to ask your family to help you name the different members before you start. If the class needs further support, demonstrate how to create a family tree and leave it on display for them to refer to.

ACTIVITY 7: CREATE YOUR OWN ACTION DANCE

Download the instrumental version of the song and, in groups or individually, create your own dance or actions, perhaps using poi with a ukelele accompaniment, for example.

Written by Janine Scott