

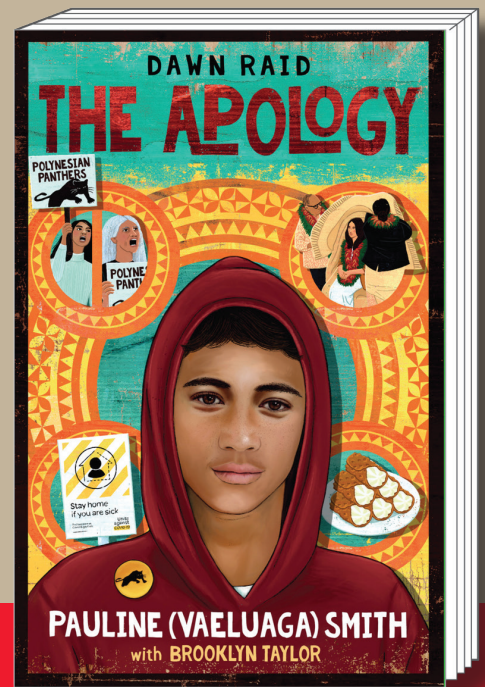
My New Zealand Story

Dawn Raid, The Apology

By Pauline (Vaeluaga) Smith
and Brooklyn Taylor

Cover illustration by Minky Stapleton

- Reading • Writing • Storytelling • Social Studies
- History • Culture



Synopsis

Dawn Raid, The Apology is a contemporary New Zealand story told through the diary of Jeremy McRae, a 14-year-old boy living in Southland during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. What begins as a humorous account of everyday life—family antics, school projects, and gaming with his friends in the ‘J-Club’—quickly evolves into a powerful exploration of identity, history, and justice.

When lockdown forces Jeremy’s family to move in with his grandmother, Granfia (Sofia), he discovers her remarkable past as a member of the Polynesian Panthers, a group that fought against racial discrimination and supported Pacific communities during the infamous Dawn Raids of the 1970s. Through Granfia’s stories, old diaries, and family talanoa, Jeremy learns about pivotal events in Aotearoa’s history, including the Bastion Point occupation, Springbok Tour protests, and the Panthers’ activism.

Jeremy’s growing awareness inspires a school project on significant historical dates, earning him top marks and an invitation to present at a teachers’ conference. His journey culminates in him joining his grandmother at the government’s formal apology for the Dawn Raids in 2021, delivered with a traditional Samoan ifoga ceremony—a deeply symbolic act of reconciliation. This moment connects Jeremy’s personal story to a broader narrative of cultural pride, resilience, and the ongoing fight for justice.

The book blends humour, family warmth, and historical truth, showing how intergenerational storytelling can empower young people to understand their roots and advocate for fairness. It highlights themes of identity, activism, cultural heritage, and the importance of remembering history, while weaving in the realities of COVID-19 lockdown life.

About the Authors

Pauline (Vaeluaga) Smith is an author and an educationalist of Samoan, Tuvaluan, Scottish and Irish heritage. She trained as a teacher, later gaining a B.Ed. and lecturing at the University of Otago. Her first book *My New Zealand Story: Dawn Raid*, published in 2018, won the Best First Book at the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults, and was picked up for publication in the USA by Levine Querido. Pauline writes full time and enjoys life with her husband Geoff in the beautiful seaside town of Riverton, Southland, NZ.

Brooklyn Taylor is Pauline Smith’s grandson. They spent a lot of time talking about the dawn raids and how more education was needed, which led them to write this book together. Brooklyn is glad that *Dawn Raid, The Apology* will be published during his final year at high school.

Writing Style

My New Zealand Story: Dawn Raid, The Apology, written for the 10+ age group, is a thought-provoking sequel to Pauline (Vaeluaga) Smith's successful *Dawn Raid*. The book is written in diary format and weaves the themes of cultural identity, activism, intergenerational storytelling, racial inequalities, resilience, friendship and family throughout.

Jeremy McRae, the diary writer, uses humour and his teenage perspective in his diary entries to take you on a journey of discovery as he uncovers his grandmother's intriguing past and important moments in Aotearoa's history. Contemporary Snapchat messages between Jeremy and his J-Club friends are sprinkled throughout the book and also highlight Jeremy's authentic voice and interactions.

At the back of the book, there's an informative selection of non-fiction content that includes Granfia's brandy snap recipe, historical notes about COVID-19, the history of the Dawn Raid Apology, a Dawn Raid poster, a letter from 1976 regarding overstayers, merchandise produced to celebrate the Polynesian Panthers 50th Anniversary, photographs of the Apology, the Polynesian Panthers and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples meeting and a petition being presented on the steps of Parliament. This back matter also includes acknowledgements, a bibliography and information about the authors.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Proficient readers ask and answer questions about the characters and events in a story to help them make sense of what they read. They make predictions, inferences and connections to their everyday lives. During the shared sessions, use some of the questions provided to help encourage deeper thinking. Have the students draw on their prior knowledge about finding your voice and identity, standing up for your rights, activism, and how the students would cope if they were thrust back into the dawn raids of the 1970s.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

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

- Do you know what the words 'Dawn Raid' refer to? Have you heard of the dawn raids of the 1970s?
- This book is entitled *Dawn Raid, The Apology*. Who might be giving the apology and for what?
- The four small illustrations surrounding the main character Jeremy are important to the story. Do you recognise what the illustrations show and how they might relate to the story? Which of the illustrations appears to be the odd one out? Why do you think that?
- Have you heard of the Polynesian Panthers? If so, what do you know about the group?
- Have you ever signed a petition? What was it for and why did you sign it?
- Why might it have taken several generations for an apology to be made?
- What's different about today's generations compared with those from 50 years ago?
- How does living through a real experience compare with reading about it in books?

COMPREHENSION:

- Jeremy and Mum lose their winning streak when they play cards. Do you crack when you're put under pressure? Explain your answer. (p.4)
- Do you remember when COVID-19 was first announced in New Zealand? How did you react to the news of it? (p.5)
- When you heard the word 'pandemic' for the first time, did you know what it meant? (p.5)
- How does New Zealand's geography help with trying to prevent a pandemic from getting to our shores? (p.5)
- Have you heard of or read *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*? What are the similarities and differences between these two diaries? (p.6)
- If you don't even notice that you're learning, what does this tell you about your teacher? (p.6)
- If you're poetic, what would your writing style be like? How could you describe Jeremy's writing style? (p.7)
- How might the J-Club have got its name? (p.7)
- What does the word 'procrastinator' mean? Why might being a procrastinator prevent you from achieving something? (p.8)
- Would you sneak out at night with your friends? Why or why not? (p.9)
- Would you have run off and left the fire to burn? Explain your answer. (p.10)



- Would your parents make you apologise to the farmer? Do you think that is reasonable? Why or why not? (p.11)
- What would you say to the farmers and their family members if you had to make an apology? (p.12)
- Which spelling of 'mould/mold' is correct for New Zealand? One of them is the spelling that the United States uses. (p.14)
- How did you and your family react when the country went into Level 4 lockdown? What plans did your family put in place? (pp.21–22)
- People react differently to the same situations. Did the people in your family react differently? Explain your answer. (p.22)
- Do you collect lots of stuff or are you a minimalist? Why do you think that you're like that? (p.26)
- Granfia does a massive burnout. Is there a member of your family who has surprised you with a special talent? Who is the person and what is their special talent? (p.28)
- Do you keep a diary? How would you feel if someone read it? (p.32)
- Have you or anyone you know been on a protest march? What was the protest about? How did you feel about the experience? Explain your answer. (p.33)
- Do you know who the aunties' cats were named after? (p.34)
- What did you find was the hardest thing about being locked down? (p.35)
- What does the word 'apartheid' mean? (p.39)
- Granfia uses masking tape to explain the concept of apartheid. Do you find it helpful to see physical objects to understand how something works? Give an example where this has helped you. (p.40)
- Why would it be difficult if people in the same household disagreed about things such as apartheid and COVID-19? How could they figure out how to live together? (p.41)
- Like Granfia, would you lie to the police in order to help a friend? Why or why not? (p.52)
- Do you think what you read in the news can be biased or not even true at all? Why is that even worse today than back in the 1970s? How has social media contributed to this problem? (p.54)
- What do you think the Dawn Raid apology is about? Who do you think will be giving the apology and to whom? (p.54)
- The word 'claw' is a collective noun for a group of panthers. What other collective nouns do you know for other animals, such as a flock of sheep? (p.61)
- Do you remember why people put teddy bears in their windows during COVID-19 lockdowns? Why do you think such a simple idea went viral? (p.68)
- Why do you think Jeremy included '2001 – Twin Towers' in his list? What do you know about the events at the Twin Towers? Where were they located? (p.80)
- Granfia talked about other apologies. Do you know about these? Do you think they should be taught in school? Why or why not? (pp.85–86)
- What do you think the term 'Educate to Liberate' means? Is it an appropriate saying for the Polynesian Panthers? (p.87)
- What does Jeremy mean when he says that he is probably one of the whitest of the J-Club but has the brownest blood? (p.88)
- Why would it be difficult for the parts of New Zealand that were on a higher alert level than other parts? (p.89)
- What does 'picking up the baton' mean? (p.97)
- Jeremy and Jay both panic when Jason falls. How do you react in situations like this? Do you remain calm or do you panic and yell? Explain your answer. (pp.104–106)
- How do you think Jeremy feels about learning more about his cultural heritage? Why might it be hard for him not feeling Samoan enough sometimes? Do you think children who have Samoan parents but have themselves grown up in New Zealand feel that way too? Explain your answer. (pp.118–119)
- Why do you think Mum nudges Jeremy and tells him to accept the cash Poppa is giving him and say thank you? (p.120)
- Why do you think Jeremy thinks that living in the North Island makes you more connected to your Samoan culture? (p.124)
- What do you think about being covered with a beautiful, finely woven tapa cloth mat called an 'ie tōga? Do you think this traditional Samoan 'ifoga' ceremony is a good way to carry out an apology? Do you think this extremely symbolic way to apologise without words is better than using actual words? Explain your answer. (p.132)
- Why do you think Jeremy gets the shivers during the Apology ceremony? (p.133)
- Why can you come unstuck when you steal other people's words and answers? Why is it best to speak from your own perspective? (p.138)
- There were more dawn raids in 2023. Similar raids and random street checks are happening in the United States too. Why do you think some people do not learn from history? Do you think history repeats itself? How can you stop that from happening? Explain your answer. (p.147)
- The Polynesian Panthers never stopped waiting for an apology. Along with many other Pasifika people, they waited 50 years for an apology for the dawn raids. Why do you think it took that long for their much-deserved apology? Is it ever too late to apologise for wrongdoings? Why or why not? (p.154)

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR ACTIVITIES



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: THE ONE . . .

Jeremy makes up three titles for his first three diary entries. He also explains how he came up with 'The One...' title starter, for example, *Entry no 1: 'The one with the illegal fart'*; *Entry no 2: The one where Dad and Ruby hustle us*; *Entry no 3: The one with the curse to be chosen*. He stole the idea from the TV show *Friends* where every episode starts with 'The one ...' Choose 10 diary entries from the book and come up with your own diary titles using 'The One ...' as your title starter.

ACTIVITY 2: READ ALL ABOUT IT

Jeremy has a folder with newspaper cuttings about Granfia's past. There are lots about protests and other related stuff. They include the 1976 dawn raids and random street checks, the 1978 Bastion Point occupation (Takaparawhau) and eviction and the 1981 Springbok (South Africa) rugby tour protests. Research more about one of these and turn your findings into a short newspaper article. The features of a newspaper article include: a short and catchy headline, a first sentence that summarises the events and hooks in the readers, a first paragraph that includes some of the 5 Ws (who, what, where, when, why), written in the third person, quotes from interviewees (written in the first person); facts, photographs and captions. Work alone, in pairs or in groups, then share your article with the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 3: SLIDES OF THE PAST

Jeremy lists some important dates in the history of Aotearoa in his school PowerPoint project. Refer to pages 79 and 80 to review the list. Choose one of these dates and events and find out more about it and how it may have affected your family. On pages 80–83, Jeremy states how they are significant in some way to him and his family. Use his work to help you. Present your PowerPoint slide to the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 4: FUTURE GOALS

On page 99, the teacher asks the students to set some goals in Year 9 that they would like to achieve by the end of Year 13. Then on page 144, Jeremy finds his old diary and his goals when he is a Year 13 student. His teacher has also kept a record of the students' goals. Brainstorm your own set of goals. These could be school-related, personal goals and maybe even a little far-fetched. Write them down and keep them in a safe place so that you have them to refer back to in years to come. You could include some short- and long-term goals too. Share your goals with a friend.

ACTIVITY 5: PLEASE HELP . . .

On page 109, the teacher uses the boys' emergency to create a 'teachable moment'. In the book, you learn some of the emergencies that the students in Jeremy's class pretend to phone 111 for, such as *my cat has spewed all over my duvet*, *my parents have grounded me* and *my Alexa won't stop farting!* Have some fun dreaming up five of your own possible emergency scenarios. Start each one with 'Please help...'. Get into groups and share your work with the others in the group.

ACTIVITY 6: THE OFFICIAL APOLOGY

The government's actual Dawn Raid Apology can be found on the official website of the New Zealand Government (<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/speech-dawn-raids-apology>). As a class, download the speech and display it where everyone can follow along and read it or print out individual copies. Your teacher could read it to the class, or you could divide the speech into different parts, with a part for each student in the class. Decide who's going to read which part of the speech. Practise your part and then come together to read the entire speech as a class activity.

Written by Janine Scott