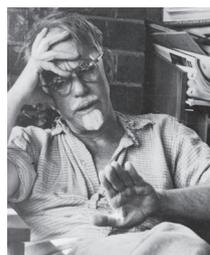


Lit: Stories from home

edited by Elizabeth Kirkby-McLeod

Contributors



Authors left to right, from top: Gina Cole, Lani Wendt Young, Rajorshi Chakraborti, Witi Ihimaera, Anahera Gildea, Elsie Locke, Owen Marshall, David Hill, Katherine Mansfield, Patricia Grace, Frank Sargeson, J.P. Pomare, Tracey Slaughter, Russell Boey, Nithya Narayanan, Ting J. Yiu

About the editor

Elizabeth Kirkby-McLeod is a New Zealand author whose poetry and writing have appeared in a range of New Zealand journals, online publications, and in the public art installation, *In Our Words* in downtown Auckland. She has published a poetry collection *Family Instructions Upon Release* (The Cuba Press, 2019), children's book *World Folk Tales* (Gilt Edge Publishing, 2021) and produces the *NZSA Oral History Podcast* series.



Synopsis of the anthology

Sixteen short stories from home-grown literary heroes, established contemporary authors, and award-winning emerging writers, are brought together in this new collection. These sixteen stories have been selected as a showcase for all, and especially for Aotearoa New Zealand secondary English classrooms and libraries.

Themes / issues

Various stories explore ideas about identity, activism, awareness, coming-of-age, society, and family.

Collection organisation

The stories are organized to progress with readers, meaning teachers can use it at different levels with year-groups and readers can continue to return to it as they grow. These teacher notes are designed to support learning across curricular in English, social studies and history.

Story Specific Questions and Exercises

'Baby Doll' by Gina Cole

Content questions:

1. What is the ethnicity of our nine-year-old narrator and where does she work?
2. Using neutral language describe in detail her working day.
3. What is the most serious physical danger the children face?
4. This story is written in the present tense and first person. Do you think this was a good narration style for this story? Explain your thoughts.
5. Select a short passage and write it in third person-past tense. Comment on the difference this makes to the strength of the story.

Deeper thinking:

- In what ways does the story celebrate the resilience of the human spirit?
- There are many injustices in this harrowing story. List the three most serious in your opinion and explain your choices.
- In what way do we in New Zealand, and the consuming public in many other countries, share some of the responsibility for the injustices in this story?
- Select ten clothing and/or toy and/or sporting items from your house. Identify the country where the items were made (not designed) and research labour and industrial relations in these countries. Write a report outlining possible steps for the ethical manufacturing and purchasing of these products. Write a letter to your local Member of Parliament outlining your concerns and asking for their help in publicising this issue.

'Fitu' by Lani Wendt Young

Content questions

6. What is Afakasi and what sort of Afakasi is the narrator?
7. Explain the concept of Fia
8. What unites the father and the daughter in this story?

Deeper thinking:

- What are three things this story has illuminated about Samoan culture that you did not know? If you are Samoan, what aspects of your culture has this story made you think more deeply about?
- Explain how what you have discovered has shed light on possible collision points with Palagi culture in New Zealand?
- Have a respectful conversation with a Samoan student from your school or from your community and ask for their views on differences and similarities between Samoan and Palagi cultures

'Out of Zone' by Rajorshi Chakraborti

Content questions:

9. Where are Sajida and Abir from and how do they make a living in Wellington?
10. What all too familiar problems are the couple encountering in their house hunting?
11. Why does Abir think it a good idea for his wife to meet the house owner?
12. What is astonishing about what Sajida discovers just off Glenmore Road?
13. Explain the double meaning in the story title.

Deeper thinking:

- Do some basic research on our characters home country and write a 100 word report covering geography, social conditions and political conditions.
- Explain the word 'diaspora' and describe the negative impact it often has on the country of origin, and the cultural alienation migrants may suffer in their new countries.
- What is the main sacrifice people like Sajida make when they move to a new land?

'Tent on the Home Ground' by Witi Ihimaera

14. What is the basis of Api's anger towards George?
15. In what way does Api feel David is patronising him?
16. Api and George appear to be verbal sparring – quote several of the angry jabs they land on each other. Would you be able to call a winner from this encounter?
17. Why does Ihimaera end the story with George using the same remark Api used at the start of the story?
18. Explain the significance of the title.

Deeper thinking:

- Create a timeline highlighting major events in the Maori struggle for cultural, political and economic justice in this country.
- Ihimaera wrote this story in 1977. Why was this an important year for Maori rights?
- Your above timeline will probably highlights actions by people such as Apirana Ngata, Sir Peter Buck and Dame Whina Cooper – and rightly so. Write an argument for Witi Ihimaera being an integral figure on your timeline.
- Are there any other writers, artists or musicians you would like to include on your timeline? Explain your choices.

‘The Queen’s Chain’ by Anahera Gildea

Content questions:

19. What two events led to Elizabeth’s and Te Ao Haere’s names?
20. Why was Te Ao not breast fed?
21. What do you think has happened to Teo Ao Haere, and what evidence or suggestions can you pick up from the story?
22. Comment on why the writer has not set out the factual events of this story more clearly.

Deeper thinking:

- Would you have preferred the events to be more clearly explained and if so how might this have detracted from the overall power of the narration?
- Research and comment on the importance for Maori of events in 1953 and 1975. The timeline you made for the Ihimaera story may be of help here.
- What major differences does this story suggest exist between Maori and Pakaha attitudes to both life and death?

‘The Lake and the River’ by Elsie Locke

Content questions:

23. What is Tina’s reaction when Garth says he doesn’t want a transistor radio out on the lake?
24. Apart from the ‘transistor’, what other setting clues are there that place this story in the 1980s?
25. What are the first indications that Tina is becoming environmentally aware?
26. Describe the growth that attending the Hiroshima peace rally gave Tina.
27. Comment on the importance of the story title.

Deeper thinking:

- Construct a timeline of New Zealand protests against Nuclear weapons. A possible beginning point could be 28 June 1973 when the HMNZS Otago set sail for Mururoa Atoll to protest French Nuclear weapon testing in the Pacific.

- Investigate David Lange’s 1986 Oxford Union debate and comment on the international response to a now famous riposte he made during this debate.
- What is particularly important about The New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone Disarmament and Arms Control Act of 1987?
- Contemporary New Zealand youth are very active in protecting the environment, but youth involvement is not a new thing in this field. Construct a poster, either digitally or on paper, celebrating fifty years of youth leadership in protecting the environment.

‘Effigies of Family Christmas’ by Owen Marshall

Content questions:

28. Construct a simple family tree or clear diagram showing who is who in this family.
29. Describe the Christmas rituals they go through and comment on both positive and negative aspects of these rituals.
30. Describe the difficult relationship between Alun and his mother.
31. Why is she so upset about him going to Australia?
32. What is an effigy and what tone does this word establish about some of the relationships in this family?

Deeper thinking:

- What rituals, if any, do your family follow at Christmas time?
- In your family what other important occasions during the year involve following set rituals?
- What is the purpose of these rituals?
- Marshall presents a traditional rural family and his story explores how family interactions expose a rural – urban divide. What are your thoughts on whether or not there is a rural – urban divide in this country? What differences are you aware of between rural and urban people in this country? For example, are there physical differences like speech patterns? Are there social differences like political allegiance?
- Hold a class debate on the moot, ‘That rural Kiwis have a healthier lifestyle than their city cousins.’ Interpret the moot broadly.
- The story also highlights difficulties with communication. Comment on the damage that can occur in a family when members do not communicate openly and freely.

‘Free as a Bird’ by David Hill

Content questions:

33. What can you establish about Darrin’s personality from the opening paragraph?
34. Why have he and his family come to this seaside bach during term time?
35. Describe Darrin’s attempts to free the bird.
36. What happens to both creatures in the end?

Deeper thinking:

- There are two fights for survival in this story. Explain how Hill links the two struggles, paying particular attention to how he uses language features and symbolism to help portray them.
- In what way does Hill suggest to us that the boy will be able to rise above the current emotional trauma of his family life?

'The Doll's House' by Katherine Mansfield

Content questions:

37. What is Aunt Beryl's initial opinion of the doll's house and how does Mansfield use certain adjectives to show her opinion?
38. What qualities about the doll's house impressed the Burnell children?
39. What did Kezia especially like about it?
40. Give several reasons why the Kelvey girls were shunned by the other girls.
41. How does Isabelle use the doll's house to reinforce her power and authority at the school?
42. Describe Lena's bullying of the Kelvey girls.
43. In what way is Aunt Beryl being bullied in the story and how might this influence her behaviour in relation to those she feels superior to?
44. What hope can be read into Else's closing words 'I seen the little lamp'?

Deeper thinking:

- 'Short stories capture a moment in time and use this moment to comment on the social conventions of the time'. Discuss how the above statement applies to The Doll's House.
- Explain how this story, written almost one hundred years ago, can be used as an expose of the New Zealand social class structure at that time.
- Do social or class divisions still exist in New Zealand society? What similarities and differences can you detect between now and 1922?
- Discuss the connections between popularity, power and bullying in a contemporary school context.
- What are the qualities that make someone popular at your school? Are there gender differences in what makes people popular?
- Hold a class discussion on the role bullying plays in your school.
- It is not only the pupils in a school that may be guilty of bullying – discuss.
- Discuss Mansfield's narrative technique; why has she selected third person instead of first person?
- **Language study** – Write a list of words, terms and expressions that would no longer be used today. Write their current equivalents.

- Research the life and writing of Katherine Mansfield. Do you agree with many international writing authorities who claim that she is still New Zealand's greatest ever writer?
- What other new Zealand writers might be on the short-list for the above honour?

'Letters from Whetu' by Patricia Grace

Content questions

45. What is the main problem Whetu has with being in the sixth form (year 12)?
46. What does Whetu like about being up the cliff face?
47. Explain the literal and the metaphoric meaning behind his comment about his parents – 'It's only me they've got under glass'.
48. What type of friend would Whetu be if you were an old mate or were in his class?
49. Whetu makes a series of serious observations along with all his joking comments – list the serious issues he raises in his letters.
50. What do each of the following quotes tell you about Whetu? 'the dropping sun and the bleeding sky and those great fat humping seas' ... 'I want to know important things and I want to know what's important' ... 'sitting in a plastic bag fastened with a wire threaded paper twist to keep the contents airtight.'

Deeper thinking

- Whetu seems to resent the widening differences between him and his mates from 'the old gang' who have left school to find jobs; yet Whetu is undoubtedly different to his mates. Discuss the ways you think he is different from his old mates. Perhaps you are going through something similar? To what extent is this phenomenon a normal part of life?
- 'Despite the dominant light-hearted tone to the letters, there is also a darkness to them'. Support this statement with evidence.
- Comment on the power of the intense first person narrative writing style Grace uses in the story.
- Select a passage where Whetu is discussing their beach activities and write it in the third person. Comment on how effective or otherwise it is compared to the first person voice.

'A Good Boy' by Frank Sargeson

Content questions

51. Explain why the narrator did not want to be a 'good boy'.
52. Why did the boy's father think that the billiards parlour was a bad place for his son to frequent?
53. Why did the boy think killing his girlfriend was the correct thing to do?
54. What was the reaction of the police etc when he said this and how might the boy's explanation of his

behaviour have saved him from being executed? Which form of execution was still in use for the crime of first degree murder when this story was written?

55. Explain what was ground-breaking about the way this story has been written.
56. What criticism may it have faced from the literary establishment when it was published in 1940?

Deeper thinking

- As a continuation of the previous question, write six colloquial and slang expressions used in this story particular to this era and suggest their modern equivalents. If there isn't one, just translate its meaning.
- Write a list of ten slang/colloquial terms particular to your generation and ask someone over sixty to translate them.
- In what ways is this story a criticism of family dysfunction?
- What type of relationship would Sargeson have preferred to see between the boy and his parents?

'Days of our Lives' by J P Pomare

Content questions

57. What does the narrator enjoy about crawling through the drainpipe?
58. What comfort does the narrator seem to get from playing with string and what does this suggest about his personality?
59. What family tragedy shadows the family throughout this story?
60. Why does the story switch back and forward between present and past tense?
61. Research the TV Soap the story gets its title from. Comment on Pomare's choice of using this title for his story and quote a link from the story to this title.

Deeper thinking

- Comment on the author's decision to use first person narration in this story and give your opinion on its effectiveness.
- In what ways would the story be different if one of the parents was the narrator?
- Test this out by writing as the mother's or father on their son's accident.
- Pomare's story suggests we still have some way to go in the understanding and treatment of those who suffer disabilities. Comment.

'The Names in the Garden' by Tracey Slaughter

Content questions

62. What job had the woman been doing for the church and in what ways did this job provide her with comfort and security?

63. What does her inability to name her flowers tell you about her?
64. Describe her usual process for collecting and arranging the flowers. Do you think her inability to name the flowers impacted on her ability to work with them?
65. Why has the pastor told her not to continue with the job and what are your thoughts about the fairness of her dismissal?
66. Where is she forced to collect flowers from now and what happens when she tries to arrange them?
67. What two things does she discover when she returns to her house after the disaster in the church?
68. Comment on the power of the final two sentences.

Deeper thinking

- Slaughter makes a number of strong thematic points in this very well crafted story. What is she saying about each of the following?
 - a) justice and fairness
 - b) Society's care for the intellectually challenged
 - c) Religious institutions
 - d) Judging people
- Slaughter uses flowers symbolically in this story. How are they used to represent the woman's life early in the story and how are they used to show her decline?
- What is the symbolism of the 'black weeds'?

'Nineteen Seconds' by Russell Boey

Content questions

69. Give a short factual account of what actually takes place in this story.
70. What role do dreams play in the narrator's attempts to come to grips with his brother's death?
71. In what ways is his mother's death different?
72. What is the importance of the story's title?

Deeper thinking

- Comment on two structural techniques Boey uses to build this story.
- Dreams seem to play an important part in our lives. Are there any particular dreams that play an important part in your life?
- Comment on the role of dreams in two important books you have read or films you have seen.
- It is often difficult to write about traumatic events, such as the ones in several of the stories in this collection. Compare Boey's handling of these events with another writer's handling of traumatic events from this short story collection.

'Atul' by Nithya Narayanan

Content questions

73. What was awkward about the airport meeting?
74. How might a first person narration have given more insight into this meeting?
75. What does Lauren enjoy about being in her father's flat?
76. Quote a comment from her father that suggests her mother's 'philanderer' remark may have been accurate.
77. What angered Lauren when her father told her he had cancer?
78. Discuss the changing size and weight of the painting Atul gives to Lauren.

Deeper thinking

- Like a lot of good short story writer Narayanan deliberately leaves a great deal unsaid in this story, and perhaps the third person narration aided this technique. Write a list of things that could have been included about Lauren's upbringing, focusing particularly on her mother's role.
- Having read and considered the issues in this story comment on the accuracy or otherwise of the mother's, 'he's a selfish bastard' comment.

'Gutting' by Ting J Yiu

Content questions

79. What is a 'mouth only' smile?
80. Why is Kim struggling to answer the reporter's questions?
81. Why does she appear to have some reservations about the rescue efforts?
82. Explain the traumatic events that have driven Kim from her home country to a remote part of a remote country.
83. What vital back-plot do we learn from the use of poems in the story?
84. How are the whale strandings used to highlight a human tragedy from Kim's homeland?
85. What terrible guilt does Kim harbour?
86. What does Kim take off into the bush at the end of the story?
87. Comment on the symbolism of the ending of the story.

Deeper thinking

- The author makes a series of links between the deaths of the stranded whales and the deaths of the young Chinese protesters in her home country. What language techniques are repeatedly used to build this link? Quote several.
- Research the Tiananmen Square protests and subsequent multiple deaths. Why might Chinese students your own age know little or nothing of these events?

- What are your views on governments 'protecting their citizens' from very uncomfortable truths? Are there any positives in such a policy?
- Research pilot whale strandings in New Zealand focusing on the causes of these strandings and the success of human efforts to save them.

Prepared by Denis Wright