

Mental Health
Awareness Week
21-27 September

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Whakarongo ki ō Tūpuna: Listen to your Ancestors

Joseph, D., & Te Whata, M. (2019). New Zealand: Oratia Books.

This picture book centres around how a teacher guides her granddaughter and her pupils to walk the path of their ancestors/tūpuna.

In Māori tradition all living things were linked through whakapapa.

The story teaches children to be strong, kind, patient, brave, respectful and positive and connects these traits to their ancestors.

Kia māia, e tama mā, e hine mā kia kaua rā koutou e murirere. Tūria te tū a tō koutou tupuna, a Tū-te-ihiihi.

Be brave, boys and girls, there's no need to panic. Stand tall like your ancestor. The most-awe-inspiring-of-them-all.

Eventually the teacher gets old and the roles are reversed. It is now her granddaughter who becomes the teacher. Because of this she can use her teaching to guide and comfort her grandmother.

Ka nui taku aroha mōu, e kui. Kia kaua rā koe e mokemoke. Haere tāua ki tō tāua tupuna, ki a Tāne-whakapiripiri.

I love you lots nan. You don't have to be lonely. Let's go to our ancestor, Tāne who keeps us close together.

Eventually her nan passes on and she is returned to the land.

Kia kaha e kui, e pai ana, kia kaua rā tāua e wehi. Nāu anō te kī, ki a tāua te Māori, ka hoki tatou katoa kit e poho o tō tatou tupuna, o Papatūānuku.

Be strong, Nan, it's okay let's not be scared. As you said, it's our belief, we all return to the care of our ancestor, The Great Earth Mother.

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In Māori tradition Papatūānuku is the land. After the earth emerged from water, it gave birth to all life. Trees, birds and humans emerge from the land and are nourished by it. Figuratively, humans are born from the womb of Papatūānuku, and return there after death.

After the tangi it is time for new beginnings. We see her granddaughter now taking over the mantle. She is ready to follow in the footsteps of her nan and start the teaching all over again.

This beautiful picture book demonstrates how Māori have a direct connection with the natural world, the earth, the sea, the land and the sky. It also shows the respect for those that have passed on their knowledge to the younger generation and the importance of doing this.

“kia mau koe ki nga kupu o ou tūpuna”

“Hold fast to the words of your ancestors”.

Reviewed by Wharepaoro Christie, MHF Kaiwhakarite Māori Development Specialist.

This beautiful picture book is written in te reo Māori and English. The rhythm of the words make it a great book to read out loud. It starts with an invite to rest, pause and connect:

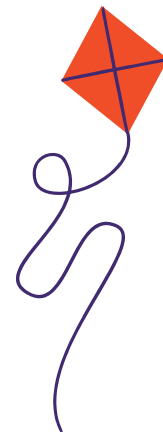
Kia tau, e hine mā, e tama mā, kia kaua tātou e manawapā.

Mātakina te pōteretere haere o ngā kapua o tō koutou tupuna, o Ranginui e tū nei.

Relax now, girls and boys, and don't stress out. Look up to the swiftly passing clouds cloaking your ancestor, The Majestic Sky Father.

A true story underlies this – in June 2016, Massey University Language Lecturer, Darryn Joseph spent time in a hospital room minding a teacher who'd become a good friend and mentor to him. Darryn wrote her a poem of appreciation, kissed her hand and said goodbye. The next day she passed away.

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The first half of the story shows a teacher looking after children, showing them how to let go of anger, anxiety and stress, stand strong and tall, and spend time in nature, linking with ancestors. In the second half, the teacher has become old and now her granddaughter reminds her of the lessons:

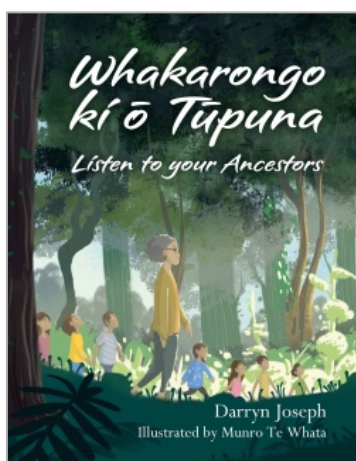
*Kia kaha, e kui, e pai ana, kia kaua rā tāua e wehi.
Nāu anō te kī, ki a tāua te Māori, ka hoki tātou katoa ki te poho o tō tātou
tupuna, o Papatūānuku.*

*Be strong, Nan, it's okay – let's not be scared.
As you said, it's our belief, we all return to the care of our ancestor, The Great
Earth Mother.*

The teacher dies. The granddaughter looks after her whānau, sharing the lessons with them.

If your whānau is experiencing grief and loss and you're looking for ways to reflect on the journey of life with your young ones, this book is helpful. The words are supported by colourful images that create space for further kōrero. I say young ones – however this book is a true classic with messages for all ages and stages. And if you're keen to practise te reo Māori, it helps with that too.

**Reviewed by Virginia Brooks, MHF Community Engagement & Health
Promotion Specialist.**



The Mental Health Foundation's Information Service brings you reviews as part of the Good Reads feature for Mental Health Awareness Week. To view more go to <https://mhaw.nz/>

