

Biographical note: Briar Wood is a well-known New Zealand Māori poet.

A. Warm-up

Look at the title. Does anyone know the meaning of this word? What language is it? What does it mean? Have a class discussion. Remember the ideas discussed for reference in section E.

B. Vocabulary

Some place names in this poem are: *Whatuwhiwhi, Tokerau, Maitai Bay*. In pairs, research in what country would you find these place names and where in that country.

There are also several words in te reo Māori or Māori language: *Paenga-whāwhā, whānau, koha, taonga, kahawai, kai*. Share your ideas about what these words mean. Do any students know the correct pronunciation for these words? If no one does, refer to a te reo Māori dictionary.

There are five words in this poem that you may not know: *hood, alternator, tender, assessing, luminous*. Place them correctly in the sentences below. Do this without using a dictionary if you can.

1. The principal looked at the students he was _____ to check who would be the best prefect.
2. The mechanic opened up the _____ of the car, to check the engine.
3. When someone is in difficulty, we may go to _____ them some assistance.
4. The _____ is the engine part that provides an electrical current.
5. We were very impressed by the shining _____ paint on the school walls.

If you have placed a word incorrectly, write a sentence showing that you now know its meaning.

C. First reading

Listen closely while the teacher reads the poem to you. Read the poem to yourselves on the whiteboard or copies if you have them. Your teacher may ask one or more students to stand and read this poem out loud. Remember to read with lots of expression and enthusiasm.

D. Language and layout

1. How many groups of lines or stanzas are there in this poem? Do they all have the same number of lines? Are the lines of similar length? What is the effect of this **irregularity**?

2. Why do you think the poet uses two languages throughout the poem? What is the effect of this **code-switching**?

3. There is one word that is a **metaphor** because it describes exactly what someone does. Can you see this word. Hint: It is a verb. What is the effect of this word?

4. Apart from lines 14 and 15 there are no words that rhyme at the end of lines, but there are several examples of **internal rhyme**, where words in the same line do sound the same or very similar. This is also known as **assonance**, where the vowel sounds are the same. Find one or two examples of this and then describe the effect of these when you read and listen to the poem.

5. There are also examples of **personification**. Can you see examples of personification? What is the effect of this? Hint: They are both in the second stanza.

6. Two adjectives **echo** one another, because they have the same meaning. Hint: You saw one of them in section B. What is the effect of this?

7. What is the effect of the final line?

Terms, such as *irregularity*, *code-switching*, *metaphor* and *internal rhyme*, may be pre-taught if they are unfamiliar to the students.

E. Understanding and evaluation

1. Who is *He* in line 1?

2. What has happened to him?

3. What has he been doing?

4. Who are *We* in line 8?

5. What have they been doing?

6. Why do they help him?

7. What is his job?

8. What does he offer them for their assistance?

9. Why won't they accept his gift? Give two reasons.

10. Does the title *Tai* suit the poem? Yes or no? Why or why not?

11. Did you like this poem or not? Why or why not? Students may be asked to read their assessments to the class. Be prepared to give good reasons for your opinions.

F. Follow-up

Imagine you are Tai. Write a thank-you note to the people who stopped to assist you when your car broke down on a distant and dusty road. Explain why you are so grateful. Your thank-you note could be in the form of a poem. Illustrate your work and be prepared to read your piece to the class and/or have it placed on the classroom wall for everyone to enjoy.



Tai

He lifts the hood on the car
fifteen kilometres from Whatuwhiwhi
in Tokerau roadside dust.

The alternator revives, then dies.
Eastwinds stir along grass song.
It is just about dusk, Paenga-whāwhā
And the darkness is coming in fast.

We've been to Maitai Bay on holiday
and stop to tender help because any of us
could be alone and uncertain on the road,
pig hunting with whānau this morning
then fishing in the glistening afternoon.

He's training as a tree feller –
assessing the direction of sway
along towering forest pathways,
cowboyed in the Australian outback.

Now he offers us the luminous kahawai
as koha, a taonga in a cardboard box.

But being well fed today and older
we suggest he might need it for kai.

He's got a long way to travel yet.

Briar Wood

Suggested answers

A. *Tai* has more than one meaning in te reo Māori. It can mean sea/tide or friend. It may also be a person's name. In this poem all three meanings are relevant.

B. The three places named, *Whatuwhiwhi*, *Tokerau*, *Maitai Bay*, are in the Far North of the North Island of New Zealand, on the Karikari Peninsula, a remote area.

Paenga-whāwhā – April

koha – gift

kahawai – a fish

whānau – family

taonga – a treasured item

kai – food

1. *assessing*
 2. *hood*
 3. *tender*
 4. *alternator*
 5. *luminous*
- D.
1. The poem has an irregular stanza structure: there are seven stanzas of unequal line length and number of lines. This paints a picture when listening to or reading the poem of an unplanned meeting of people who did not know each other earlier. The poem conveys this spontaneity.
 2. There could be more than one reason why the poet employs code-switching between te reo Māori and English. Of course, the poet wishes to convey the fact that the entire encounter is in an area where there are many Māori and, in this case, the meeting is between Māori. The overall effect reinforces this aspect. It is quite natural that te reo Māori is used. In Aotearoa New Zealand, te reo Māori is an official language, and the poet writes in te reo Māori because New Zealand audiences are attuned to it and usually know at least some words. There is also a possibility that the poet would like to use more te reo Māori but is not very fluent in the language.
 3. The word is *cowboyed*, which captures very well the way trees were planted, tended and cultivated in the vast outback areas of Australia by young, independent people unafraid of physical work – very similar to how cowboys acted in the American West. The verb is metaphorically used – the young man is a form of cowboy.
 4. Examples of internal rhyme are – *revives/dies*, *along/song*, *darkness/fast*, *Bay/holiday*, *alone/road*, *cowboyed/outback*, *koha/taonga* – as well as the word echo of *dust* and *dusk*. These confirm the songlike or *mōteatea* (initially an oral form of Māori literature of several types) quality of the poem and gives it a definite rhythm and beat similar to a spoken conversational encounter.
 5. *The alternator revives, then dies* – the mechanical part is given human characteristics. In the Māori world (te ao Māori), inanimate items are often accorded human characteristics. *Eastwinds stir along grass song* has positive, songlike (*waiata*) qualities further stressing the personification of nature.
 6. The two adjectives are *glistening* and *luminous*, giving further emphasis to the positive nature of the encounter and further emphasised by the words *koha* and *taonga*.
 7. The last single line brings completeness to the poem and succinctly conveys the point that the young man has a long way to go in his journey, both on the road and in his life. (See E.7.)
- E.
1. *He* is the young man *Tai*.
 2. His car has broken down, kilometres away from anywhere and night is descending.
 3. He has been pig-hunting with his family earlier that day, and then fishing in the afternoon.
 4. *We* are the speaker/poet and members of their family (*whānau*). They are returning from their holiday in nearby Maitai Bay.
 5. They help the young man as is expected – not only in Māori culture, but also traditionally in New Zealand culture.
 6. *Tai* (we assume this is his name) has been working in the forestry industry in the outback area of Australia.
 7. Reciprocity comes into play in such encounters. A *koha* (gift of thanks) for the assistance he receives is a natural act for *Tai*. For the speaker/poet's group, this is a *taonga*, an item of special value – a gift of a fish, a *kahawai*.
 8. The family members tactfully suggest that *Tai* will need the fish because, not only have they already eaten earlier, but also as well as being older, and wiser, they realise *Tai* has a long physical, emotional and spiritual journey ahead of him yet. The last line summarises the moral of the poem, which is help and share when you can, especially with those in need.
 9. The title is especially appropriate, because it encapsulates all the meanings of the word. It is a name, it is the sea and the tides and the encounter is on a peninsula with beaches, it is a friend or companion. Everything is interconnected.