

# TEACHER NOTES

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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Like its predecessors, this Annual is packed with new imaginative writing and visual art for New Zealand readers. The content has been commissioned from many of Aotearoa's best writers and artists.

We know that our target age-group – from upper primary through to high school – is made up of many different kinds of readers who reflect different reading tastes and capacity. We want every one of them to have access to substantial, pleasurable reading experiences.

*Annual 3* brings together a jostling chorus of voices across a wide range of forms. There is something for every kind of reader in your classroom: fiction, visual stories, multi-media texts, stories in unexpected guises (a board game, a song, a recipe, a dictionary), essays and morsels of memoir, comics, poetry, and reflections on artworks from Aotearoa.

*Annual 3* is unique in contemporary global publishing for young people. We believe it's a stimulating resource for the New Zealand classroom, one that offers students reading and writing experiences in engaging and fruitful ways.

## Using Annual 3

The following lessons have been developed around the two English curriculum strands: students make meaning (listening, reading, viewing) and create meaning (speaking, writing, presenting). We offer a guide for the close reading and discussion of three flash non-fictions and two satirical texts along with suggestions for writing and follow-up activities. Think of these lessons as models or templates from which you might devise classroom work across the entire, varied range of content in *Annual 3*.

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# 1. Flash non-fiction: True stories, told well

This form is a subset of creative non-fiction, stories that are grounded in fact (not fictional) but told with narrative techniques we usually associate with fiction: figurative language, vivid setting and characterisation, compelling voice, and evocative tone. Flash non-fiction limits word length to heighten impact and intensity. A scene or event, a person or object, is distilled in approximately five hundred words or less, which makes it an ideal writing model for the classroom. Additionally, as non-fiction, it's an attractive form for those students who struggle to "make stuff up". They can expand and enjoy creative writing without the burden of having to invent subject matter.

Flash non-fiction also allows (even encourages) students to pay attention to the ordinary aspects of their world – objects, encounters, incidents, habits, obsessions – and it offers a way to suggest character, emotions, or significant events. In this respect, it is closer to poetry, and like poetry, the word limit requires the writer to pay close attention to structure, to selection and distillation, to the rhythmic variation of sentences, to the beats of paragraphs. Each word and sentence must earn its place. In other words, flash non-fiction offers the complete creative writing lesson!

## Preparation

Prepare students for these lessons by emphasising that creative ideas can come from anything and anywhere. All writers, whatever their form, are alert to the myriad possibilities the world offers. They are noticing people and hoovering up material from the little and the large around them.

- William Wordsworth went for a walk in a forest with his sister Dorothy and was entranced by the daffodils ("I wandered lonely as a cloud").
- James Brown noticed internet spam and made a clever poem with it ("Spamtoum").
- The English poet Fiona Benson turned her loathing of cockroaches into an ode ("Mama Cockroach, I love you").
- Jenny Bornholdt's car wouldn't start, but she was rescued by the AA mechanic ("Then Murray Came").
- Sam Duckor-Jones wrote a flash non-fiction for *Annual 2* about his collection of beanies, a piece that was effectively a self-portrait.
- In the same book, Eve Armstrong's flash non-fiction ruefully contemplates the thrill and shame of an early shoplifting experience.

Literally anything is a possible subject for creative writing – but first you need to practise and polish your noticing skills, paying attention to the who and what, the where and why of the world you live in.

### Thinking and discussing

Provide an opportunity for students to read this text in an earlier session before you focus on its narrative features. Ideally, the piece should be read aloud. Ask students to note features they particularly enjoy or are interested in discussing.

What is this piece about?

- Being different (living with a disability).
- Finding comfort and affirmation, even guidance, from a toy that endorses lived experience and offers the chance to act out ideal ways of being (“Nobody asked Becky what was wrong with her. She was always smiling ... she got a job ... She got nail tattoos ... She had twin babies.”).

The author lives with a physical disability but her life is not defined by that disability. She experiences life in full and relishes it. Where is this shown?

- Henrietta’s wheelchair enables her life and is sometimes a distinguishing characteristic (“my wheelchair was a useful coat rack”); the chair helps her team win duck, duck, goose and tag.

What else do you learn about the writer’s character and life?

- She’s determined and independent of mind (she ignores teachers’ prohibitions about running with a wheelchair; she’s quite clear that being best friends with your sister is fine, despite some peers’ views).
- She has a demonstrable resilience when faced with difficulty.

Discuss the paragraph beginning “Getting my first wheelchair”. Henrietta has anxieties but thinks her way through them.

What is the writer suggesting with the penultimate paragraph?

- Without her original wheelchair, Becky is somehow diminished as a role model: “perched uncomfortably on the edge of her seat, she wasn’t as confident or as ready for adventures”.
- Becky has served her purpose: Henrietta is launched, Becky can stay packed away.

What features illustrate the writer’s themes and make it a strong piece of writing?

- Throughout, the writer weaves aspects of her life with Becky’s, a kind of fusion that illustrates the doll’s significance.
- She’s selective with her material, choosing memorable moments or facts that emphasise her themes: the exciting arrival of Becky, Becky’s abilities, her own wheelchair’s properties and the way it opens out her life.

Focus on the first paragraph, noting the way it draws the reader in.

- It's written with economy, but has telling details (sensory texture, a sense of relationship, a sense of place and time).
- It with-holds precisely what is happening, an effective device for building interest and maybe even a little tension.

Note the slight opacity of the opening sentence. Henrietta begins with "not knowing", but the "what else" suggests something important is remembered. It's a little mysterious and beguiling.

Which phrase particularly hooks the attention? ("what else I got"). The final sentence of the paragraph delivers the answer: it's the author's birthday. Clearly one present stood out.

Discuss what happens between those sentences to demonstrate how much is conveyed and how selectively? What information does the writer give?

- She's crawling but we're not sure why. She's a twin. She and Sally have rituals.

What state of mind/emotions are suggested?

- excitement, eagerness, sleepiness, deferred gratification, the twins enjoy guessing

Study the final paragraph. What does it tell you?

- Adult Henrietta is fully independent.

What do the final two lines suggest?

- The writer has an immediate and positive connection with another person in a wheelchair; she's part of a community that understands her unique perspective and experience.

Compare the first and last paragraphs and discuss how well they bookend this flash non-fiction. What "journey" is achieved between these paragraphs?

Discuss the second paragraph. What is conveyed here?

- Becky's origins. Sisterly closeness. Excitement. Henrietta's mother helping with the wires - perhaps it's difficult for her? Adapting the toy wheelchair.

What does the writer mean with the final sentence? (She and Becky are one.)

This piece traverses 20 years in six hundred words. Look at how the writer uses paragraphing to move back and forth through time and jump over years and experiences that aren't as relevant.

Henrietta varies her sentence and word lengths. What effect does this achieve?

Is "Becky" a good title. If so, why? If not, what would you suggest as an alternative, and why?

## Writing and presenting

### *Uber flash non-fiction exercises*

These are exercises to build your match-fitness for a 500-word flash non-fiction. Think of them as the observational equivalent of triceps or lateral workouts before a run or game.

1. Write 100 words about an object you know well. You should include a description of the object and where it usually lives. The aim is to be as precise and economical as possible. Write in the third person and the past tense.
2. Write 120 words showing two people throwing a ball back and forth. You should show the setting (inside or out) and suggest at least one person's skill (or lack of). Once again, the aim is to keep the telling tight. You probably only have room for three or four throws. Write in the first person and the past tense.
3. Write 150 words in which you watch someone open a wrapped present. Describe how they proceed (are they a ripper or a careful undoer?). Include some speculation about what's inside. End with the revelation of the contents. Again, precision and economy are the name of the game. Write in the first person and the present tense.

A tip: Don't muck around with introductory statements. Jump straight to the substance of the piece. For example, "The wrapping was black with silver sparkles (our grandmother was a practicing witch). No ribbon. Cass looked at it from every side ..."

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### *Flash non-fiction*

Henrietta uses the significance of a gift (an object) to explore the development of her relationship with her wheelchair – and by extension, her disability. The advent of Becky is a hinge-point in her life.

1. Consider objects or experiences in your life that have been significant. How have they helped or comforted you or changed your thinking or led you to new experiences or people (for example, a piece of technology, a book, a tool, sports equipment, an instrument, a journey, a social event, a building, a song, a news event)?
2. Note everything to do with this item or experience. What telling details can you bring to the piece?
3. Read through your notes. Consider what material you would select to show the reader why and how this object/experience has affected you (your theme) in a flash non-fiction of five hundred words. At most, you'll want three or four moments/incidents/revelations.
4. Using "Becky" as a model, sketch a rough outline of your piece through six or seven paragraphs.
5. Pay particular attention to your first and last paragraphs. Where do you want this small tale to end? How might the ending subtly sum up the heart of the piece? How might the beginning pull the reader in and make them want to read on?

6. "Becky" is written in the past tense (the author is remembering), apart from the last paragraph, where Henrietta's life is brought up-to-date. What tense(s) might work best for your piece?
7. Pay attention to variation in your sentence lengths. Think carefully about how paragraphing can help cross time and place and smooth the progress of your piece.
8. Critique your first draft and ask the following: Are there redundancies? What can I leave out? Is there anything missing – something that might better illustrate the heart of the piece? How precise and apt is my language? Can I find more expressive vocabulary or is it a little over-egged? Are my paragraph shifts smooth? How tight are my sentences? Can I make them sleeker?
9. Answering these questions should help you craft a second draft. You might need a third.
10. Don't forget a title. A really good title is suggestive and a little elusive.

### **Follow up**

#### *A fictional gloss*

Henrietta Bollinger writes about the advent of Becky from her point of view. But her twin sister, Sally, was closely associated with Becky, too. She would likely tell a subtly different story.

Imagine your flash non-fiction told in the first person from the point of view of someone who knows you. This requires some imaginative speculation about how this narrator sees both you and the object/experience. It also requires you to fully imagine the narrator's personality and their relationship to you. In essence, these changes make the piece a fiction.



### Thinking and discussing

Provide an opportunity for students to read this text in an earlier session before you focus on its narrative features. Ideally, the piece should be read aloud. Ask students to note down features they particularly enjoy or are puzzled by. Make sure they see the illustration too.

What is this piece about?

- Scrabble and its pleasures: the acts of calculation, the feats of memory and, importantly, the crucial role bluffing plays in competitive Scrabble.
- It’s also a gently mocking self-portrait. Nick Ascroft seesaws between hubris and humility as he plays championship Scrabble.
- It’s also an affectionate portrait of the English language: its liveliness and strangeness, the lexicon that has fallen out of use (the life and death of words).

How would you describe the tone of the piece? And what is the effect?

- There’s a clever balance of registers. On the one hand, it has the tone of an instructional piece of writing: clear, direct statements that help the understanding of a subject that’s quite difficult to explain, orally or in writing. But it’s also funny, a little sardonic (identify the amusing parts), and friendly (vernacular language and syntax).
- Additionally, it revels in abstruse language. There’s a nerd’s passion behind it and a near comedy in that passion, a confident assumption that the reader will be as beguiled by this arcane pastime as the author.
- This blend makes what could be a dry and technical description infinitely more palatable and enjoyable.

How does the writer hold the reader’s attention?

- There’s a central tension. Will his vaunted ability to see “a poker face flicker” help him win the game?
- He structures it carefully. There’s a problem (“bournees”), he calls bluff correctly (solving the problem), and then makes several promising moves (further problems despatched). Then “blueness” offers a winning move. It’s in the bag; it will definitely win the game. Except it doesn’t. Yet Nick draws out the tension until the penultimate line – a sheepish, comical sign off, showing both the deflation of losing and recognition of the game’s twists and turns. He also makes the point that all players are dependent, to a degree, on the fall of the tiles.

What tense is the piece in? Why do you think Nick chose that tense?

- It adds to the immediacy and tension of the game's progress.

The Scrabble words are in BLOCK LETTERS, as they appear on the tiles. What other reasons might Nick have for styling them that way?

- It's inherently comical, as if the (often unusual) words are being SHOUTED. They assume the same dominance on the page they have in the course of a game. They're almost personified, defiant entities that challenge the player (and the reader) to tussle with them.
- It makes them easier to read and to accommodate in the evolving story.

How many of the Scrabble words in this text do you know? Can you find the meanings of the others? If an ordinary dictionary doesn't have the definitions, try the online Scrabble word finder: [collinsdictionary.com/games/scrabble/word-finder](http://collinsdictionary.com/games/scrabble/word-finder)

What emotions does Nick own up to or imply (anxiety, pride, exhilaration, disappointment)? Identify their appearance in the text.

Describe Nick's (and Murray's) game tactics.

- Bluffing, decoding facial expressions and gestures, controlling facial expressions and gestures, the fast calculation of opportunities and the opponent's likely moves in response, risk taking.

How do you interpret the final two sentences. (It's a comic deflation.)

Focus on the third and fourth paragraphs. Nick's brain is working overtime. How does he show this? Give examples.

- He lists the flurry of thoughts he's having. He relies on short sentences to give pulse and forward momentum to the paragraphs, to underscore the suggestion of fast, tense thinking.

Nick telescopes this piece on the closing moves of the game with Murray (on the board, the letter tiles, the words, his racing thoughts). Why?

Consider all the things he doesn't tell you in this piece.

- A description of Murray, where the game's being played, sensory details, personal history.

What might be the effect of including some of these details?

- The piece's tension and impact would be diffused.

What things are implied?

- A history of participation in Scrabble tournaments, furious memorising of the official word list, Murray's inner calculations, the sounds of the game, aspects of Nick's personality and interests.

Based on this text, could you describe the aim, moves, and rules of a Scrabble game?

Study the first paragraph. Discuss the techniques Nick uses to engage the reader's attention.

- The use of vernacular: "A poker face, right?", "do a cool little salute".
- The use of questions to establish intimacy with the reader.
- Asserting that bluffing is lying: implying that both poker and Scrabble have a high degree of gamesmanship.

Discuss the title and its repetition near the end. Having read the piece, how do you now read the title? What kind of a statement is it when considered alongside the body of the piece? (It's both sincere and ironic: the game is frustrating and thrilling.)

What does the final sentence imply? "One day, you too will beat me." (Nick will continue to play; the thrill outweighs the frustrations!)

What does the accompanying illustration add to the written piece?

### **Writing and presenting**

Nick Ascroft uses the concluding moments of a tournament Scrabble game to celebrate the highs and lows of a game he's clearly devoted to. In so doing, he conveys a good deal about himself as well as the make-up and progress of the game: tactics, racing thoughts, the vaulting desire to win, the piquant pleasure of a good move, the deflation of losing.

1. Think of a game, sport, or tactical battle in which you engage with another person or team (physical, analogue, or digital) that might make a similarly good flash non-fiction. You may need to sketch out the stages of play, but pay attention to the parts of the game that might provide the best sense of tension, perhaps where the dominance goes back and forth.
2. Zero in on that period of play. Make that the substance of your piece.
3. Think about what you want the reader to understand about the game. In essence, you're showing why you enjoy it.
4. You will need to show both the game's aim and the coordinates of the play period as economically as possible, and with precise and vivid language.

5. Note how Nick Ascroft bookends his text with an introduction (in his case, an explanation of bluffing) and a summary line. The progress of the play – with its attendant ups and downs – is in between. Consider what an intro and summary line might bring to your piece. (It's a useful way of imposing structure.)
6. Depending on the code/game you choose, you'll use a particular vocabulary. Think about how that vocabulary can enrich your piece and engage your reader and how skillfully you can deploy it. (Make sure its meaning is clear. Assume your reader has only a rough sense of your corner of the competitive world, whether it's rugby, online gaming, chess, or stockcars.)
7. Think about your ending first. This will helpfully orient the direction of your piece.
8. It may be useful to organise your material into a rough outline of paragraphs. Think of this as a kind of scaffolding that helps you climb the piece successfully.
9. Think about what tense you prefer. This will be related to the tone and energy of your piece. Present tense gives an immediacy. The sense of recall that comes with past tense has a different flavour. Experiment.
10. Remember: you don't have a lot of words. There's no time for sidebar descriptions or rangy dialogue (though, depending on the competition in play, the odd bit of "needling" dialogue might suit your purpose). Patrol your information and sentences ruthlessly. What can you leave out? Is there variation in your sentence lengths? Is that variation enhancing the piece?
12. There's room, though, for detail that briefly lights up a scene or mood. But be selective.
13. It's useful to have a reader who is unfamiliar with your game/sport. If there's something they don't quite understand, consider how you might modify to phrase more precisely. You want your reader to be able to visualise the progress of play to some degree.
14. Remember a title. Consider how it can encapsulate the heart of your piece.

### Thinking and discussing

Provide an opportunity for students to read this text in an earlier session before you focus on its narrative features. Ideally, allow them to study the photos of the author and his grandmother, then read the piece aloud. Ask students to note features they particularly enjoy or are puzzled by.

What is this piece about?

- The expression of a grandmother’s love for her grandson through the provision of food.
- The writer’s dawning consciousness of why food might have seemed to his grandmother to be the ultimate expression of love.
- The comfort and sense of security experienced by a child in the embrace of a loving grandparent; the pleasure in the indulgence of certain foods, particularly treats.

What actually happens in the piece?

- There’s little action. Victor’s grandmother arrives at the beginning of lunchtime to deliver him KFC.
- This memory prompts a reflection on his lifetime of spoiling with food by his grandmother.

Victor devotes quite a few lines to the description of the food Nan provides: the KFC, the savoury and sweet treats. Why does he linger over these? What effect does it have?

- Indicates the impression that food has made on his memory.
- It’s both sensorily pleasurable to read and suggests selfless labour and abundance.
- His recital of food is almost reverent, a loving litany of Nan’s cooking and devotion.

What does Victor come to realise as he writes this piece?

- That food may have been singularly important for his grandmother because of living through the deprivations of the Great Depression.
- That perhaps he never conveyed how much he loved her.

What else do you learn about Victor’s grandmother?

- She’s was Scottish-born but emigrated to NZ. She lived mid-20th century. She’s determined: “She’s on a mission. And her mission is to get to you.”

Victor writes this piece in the second person. Why do you think he chose that point of view? What effect does it have?

- It underscores the sense of him remembering down the years, the removal in time from his childhood self and the nostalgia that comes with that memory. He's looking back at young Victor who waits confidently for his KFC. Then he's reminding young Victor about the marvel of his attendant grandmother, her ritual gift of food, and her obvious love and devotion.

Why does he use the present tense?

- For a sense of immediacy and energy. "You're at school, sitting on one of the benches." The reader is instantly beside adult Victor, looking at young Victor as he watches his mates and waits for his grandmother.

Try the first paragraph in the past tense and the first person. What changes?

- Less sense of looking at his grandmother (and himself) from a ruminating distance, a diminution of the reflectiveness.
- The past tense creates a subtly different tone: flatter and with less momentum.

Focus on the first paragraph. It's cleverly structured and wonderfully economical. What can you say about it?

- The setting, voice, and point-of-view are landed in one sentence.
- There are two sentences in which the reader is briefly misdirected (ie: he's setting you up to think that Victor has nothing for lunch).
- Then, a pungent sentence: "Today you don't need one because instead, what you have is a grandmother." And there she is in the fourth line, the subject of the piece.
- Then another vivid but economical description of her ("sturdy, grey haired, and bespectacled, as she slowly makes her way".)
- Finally, two short concluding sentences that effectively set up the Victor-grandmother relationship and the emotional heart of the piece.

Summarise the information in paragraphs 2 and 3 to see how Victor builds his text, for example:

- Victor watches lunch approaching, with a couple of clues as to what it is. A brief warm connection between them. His grandmother retraces her steps.
- The KFC box and its contents are lovingly itemised. A comical zinger about his friend's sad lunches, etc.

Note where he chooses to break for each new paragraph. Why does he have the one-line paragraph?

At which point does the piece move from the “real-time” lunch memory? Note that the remainder of the piece is explaining what that anecdote represents (the theme).

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How would you describe the final paragraph?

- A summation of what the food really meant
  - A link to the title.
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What do you make of Victor’s sign-off? (“Always your bonnie wee bairn, Nan. Love Victor.”) What does it mean? (Beautiful little child.) What does it imply? Does it change the way you see the piece? How?

- It suggests the foregoing has been a letter without its salutation, he’s been addressing Nan all along. It’s almost as if the reader has stumbled on a piece of private correspondence.
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Discuss the title. How well does it represent the piece?

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Discuss the photographs. How would you describe the look on Victor’s face in each one?

- Like Gollum staring at the Ring (“My precious ...”); like the cat that’s got the cream
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When might the photos have been taken? (Possibly a birthday celebration: there’s a cake at the edge of the second photo. And Nan seems to be raising her glass in a toast.)

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Discuss the design of this double spread. (A 1970s photograph album.) Why might the designer have chosen this approach?

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## **Writing and presenting**

Victor Rodger’s flash non-fiction is a homage to his grandmother’s way of expressing her love (buying him tasty treats, cooking his favourite meals).

1. Think about those who love you and the ways in which they demonstrate that love. Which person immediately springs to mind as a good subject for a flash non-fiction?
2. Using “Fu’ the Noo?” as a model, write a flash non-fiction (of no more than 450 words) that both shows and reflects on the ways that person demonstrates their affection. Use Victor’s structure as a guide: an episode or two illustrating that person’s loving actions, with some reflection on what those actions tell you about this person and their life.

3. Victor uses the specificity of nouns to evoke the senses – quad, lunchbox, stripes, box, man, thigh, drumstick, potato – and the litany of delicious edible treats in the fifth paragraph. (That list is also an economical way of showing the other person’s continual generosity.) He’s also sparing with his adjectives. They’re never merely decorative. They give information and make description more precise: grey haired, bespectacled, cardboard box, bearded man. Think about how you can use language economically for maximum effect.
4. Victor brings a charming detail to heighten his portrait of Nan: her Scottish slang (“fu’ the noo”). It’s also an efficient way of implying two important aspects of her life (Scottish upbringing, immigration to Aotearoa). Make a list of your person’s singular characteristics and think about how they might be fitting for your piece. (Remember, less is more.)
5. The sign-off to Victor’s piece suggests that the foregoing portrait is almost a letter to his grandmother (though the “you” is himself). You could try your piece as an explicit letter in which the you is the person in your portrait: *Dear X, your XX is hanging next to my mirror* (for example). Alternatively, you could take Victor’s lead and write in the second person, addressing your old or current self.
6. What tense will work best for your text? “Becky” by Henrietta Bollinger is a good model for past tense, “Fu’ the Noo?” for present tense. You may want to alternate tenses. Consider how breaking your piece into different sections might accommodate two tenses.
7. There are two snatches of direct dialogue in “Fu’ the Noo?”. Both convey important bits of information, but they also provide a little variation from the dominant narrative exposition. How might dialogue freshen or vary your piece as well as telling or implying something important? Again, a dash will probably be more effective than a torrent.
8. Think about tone. This will depend on both the person you’re portraying and their actions. Victor’s piece has a reflective quality, spiked with a couple of funny, specific observations (“All your sad friends with their sad cheese sandwiches and their browning apple slices”). He’s looking back with a full heart and a sense of loss. But your subject may require a different tonal register.
9. Think about your last paragraph. Will it be a summary? Will you end on a more elusive note? Will it be just one line? Sometimes a final paragraph reveals itself as you’re writing. Sometimes it can be clear from the beginning and you can write towards it.
10. When you’ve finished your first draft, reread with a critical eye. Is every word earning its place? Does each paragraph have its own integrity and lead smoothly to the next? Is there an overall feeling of unity? Are the tone, tense, point of view, vocabulary, sentence rhythms all serving your theme?
11. What are your title options? Try a few. Exchange work with a classmate. Respond to each other’s titles. Do they embody the theme and tone of the text? If not, suggest alternatives.



## Follow up

*He whakaahua, he maumaharatanga: a miniature flash non-fiction*

If we're lucky, we have older whānau members whom we come to know and often love. But some come to us only as figures in photographs or stories.

Read Anahera Gildea's poem "He whataahua, he maumaharatanga" (page 111). In six four-line stanzas, she describes her tupuna at a paradoxical moment in Aotearoa's history. Early photographic technology is capturing portraits of Māori for posterity, but conversely, te ao Māori is on the cusp of being catastrophically undermined by Pākehā settlement.

Using Anahera's poem as a prompt, write a flash non-fiction miniature (poetry or prose) about an ancestor you know only through an image or story. This piece should be grounded in fact. You are reporting what you see or know – but introduce some speculation, some questions you may have about your distant relative. You may want to directly address this relative, using the second person.

Keep the piece to 150 words and use six stanzas like the poem. This is an exercise in ruthless compression. You're attempting to convey as much as possible, but once again, you'll need to be selective, every word earning its place.

## 2. Satire and Parody: Exposure and Critique

Satire is an artistic form that exposes and critiques the frailties of human behaviour – often comically, sometimes harshly. In essence, it's an attack on something the critic finds less than ideal. They're calling it into question, perhaps even denouncing it. Satire is so ubiquitous in popular culture that most of us are steeped in it, often without realising. It uses a range of techniques: humour, irony, hyperbole, dramatic understatement.

Examples of satire include political cartoons, media columnists (Steve Braunias's "Diary of" column satirises notable people), television programmes ("South Park" satirises nuclear family television shows), online news and information sites (The Onion, Uncyclopedia), musical genres (chillwave, vaporwave), and famous works of literature (*Alice in Wonderland*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Animal Farm*).

Satire is often described as holding a mirror up to society – something that was first suggested by

Jonathan Swift, one of the great English literary satirists whose essay "A Modest Proposal" satirised heartless English attitudes to the Irish poor by suggesting the impoverished might alleviate their economic situation by selling their children as food for the wealthy. "Satire is a sort of glass," wrote Swift, "wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own."

Parody is a satirical device. It's a comical imitation (caricature) of a person or situation or another creative work, exaggerating aspects of the subject for laughs. The New Zealand comedian Tom Sainsbury regularly parodies well-known politicians on social media. "Bored of the Rings" by the Harvard Lampoon parodies both the length and ubiquity of *Lord of the Rings*. Reductress is a website that parodies women's magazines. YouTube offers a feast of parody: visual artists, comedians, musicians, popular culture commentators, and more ...

### Preparation

Discuss the following features of satire and parody.

**Humour:** A powerful satiric ingredient. The underlying message is often more digestible if it provokes laughter.

**Irony:** Expressing one's meaning by using language or visual tools to signify the opposite for comic effect or emphasis. Also, a state of affairs or event that appears contrary to one's expectations and (usually) seems funny as a consequence.

**Hyperbole:** To greatly exaggerate a situation or a person's characteristics and behaviour so they become ridiculous.

**Reversal (antithesis):** Presenting the opposite of the normal (or accepted) state of things.

**Juxtaposition:** Placing things/people close together for humorous comparison or contrast.

**Understatement:** A presentation of something or someone that deliberately (and often with comic effect) reduces its particular quality or trivialises its importance. Deadpan (emotionless) statement is a related effect. New Zealanders habitually use understatement. It's practically a national style of delivery. "It was a bit rough" is often used to describe an extremely challenging situation.

### Thinking and discussing

Preface an analysis of this satirical piece with a discussion on satire, including its history and the techniques it employs.

Research definitions and examples of satire and parody. Which forms of satire do you consume – and on which platforms? What is particularly appealing about your favourite forms? How might classmates’ different choices reflect their emerging political/social views and funny bones?

What techniques are being used in the different satirical forms you like (film, including mockumentary, podcasts, online video, music, comics, novels, plays). Share some examples of hyperbole, irony, understatement, cliché, etc. from your favourite satires.

Discuss the social and political value of satire: its capacity to draw attention to the absurd and to undermine or discredit dishonest or destructive behaviour in both public and private life.

Provide an opportunity for students to read “Frog Hits Ten Million Followers” before you focus on its narrative features. It’s a good idea to read it aloud, too. The parody becomes a little more pointed, and doubt about the article’s veracity creeps in.

What are your immediate responses to the article? Does it seem credible? Why?

- Using known or plausible facts about frogs; the mention of GST; the place names; popular culture and business references; David Attenborough’s name; referencing the dreariness of lockdown; using specificity to imply authority and authenticity (the dimensions of the fish tank); Beau’s dialogue, which suggests a plausibly canny and loquacious 12-year-old with a lively and credible vernacular.

Discuss the way the presentation of the piece carefully apes newspaper design, complete with information about cost, contact details, etc.

What aspects of the article cast doubt on its credibility? Why?

How might you disprove the existence of Beau, Ribbit Unmoved, the *Whero Times*, and Pablo Edmonds?

- A YouTube search of Beau Samuels and Ribbit Unmoved. A search of wherotimes.co.nz

Are these platforms definitive? What other ways might you prove or disprove the existence of an alleged person or news platform?

What is “Frog Hits Ten Million Followers” spoofing?

- The herd instinct and credulity that drives much social-media phenomena
- The often baffling success of viral social-media subjects
- The frenzy of online “creativity” (and money making), particularly during the Covid lockdowns
- The inevitable commodification and monetising of cultural and social experiences
- The inherent comedy in the register of written news, especially suburban newspapers (deadpan, largely unnuanced statements and the comical juxtapositions of facts)
- The ubiquity of cliché in news reporting.

Identify the elements of satire within the piece.

- The slightly over-eager and breathless style of Pablo Edmond’s journalism (parody)
- The inappropriate use of the vernacular in the exposition (straight reporting is usually more formal); Pablo’s own “voice” is creeping in: “What do you know?”, “Chunk of change”, “What hole have you been living down?”, “Ribbit’s monumental inactivity”, “Then insanity!” (parody)
- The odd placement of the occasional unnecessary or exaggerated fact, for example, “Beau studied Ribbit in his 600 x 300 x 300 mm tank”, “Ninety-seven percent of the time, Ribbit is completely still” (parody)
- The use of vernacular cliché: “the world knocking at us door”, “big chunk of change”, “running on empty” (parody)
- Beau and Ribbit’s success (hyperbole)
- The wellness ideology: millions staring at Ribbit’s stillness (parody, hyperbole)
- The ridiculousness of the Ribbit product spinoffs, such as the Wisdom of Ribbit underwear (juxtaposition)
- Ribbit as an “icon for our times” (hyperbole, irony)
- Ribbit’s alleged “irony” (a meaningless understatement).

In te reo Māori, whero means “to turn red” or “bum”. Why might that choice of name for the newspaper be satirical?

## Writing and presenting

### *Slings and Arrows: committing satire*

Think about what you might like to parody in a short newspaper article. A social phenomenon? A social group? A prominent individual? A school ritual? An absurd situation? (You might like to check out Pablo Edmonds’ earlier reporting in *Annual* and *Annual 2* for some steers as to subject matter.)

1. Read some local newspapers, paying attention to the slightly earnest and boosterish pieces about people and community. Note aspects of the journalistic style. How might you channel that singular style effectively in your own piece?

2. Is there some larger point you want to make? A commentary on baffling or unsavoury aspects of human behaviour (bigotry, greed, political chicanery, war)? Or is the piece pointing up quieter aspects of human frailty (vanity, fomo, competitiveness, humble bragging, shallow wokeness)?
3. Using the satiric elements of “Frog Hits Ten Million Viewers” as a model, write an article on your subject that seeks to be plausible but has sufficient (comedic) clues to cast doubt and mislead an unwitting reader.
4. Pay attention to Pablo’s real skills – his economy and variety of voice (both exposition and dialogue). Despite its nuttiness, Pablo’s piece does convey information and has entertaining sass. His sentences are sleek, even contracted. Straight off the bat, he nails the subject of the article. He uses dialogue effectively. His specificity creates comedy (“I have to pay GST now, which sucks”). He ends with a summary, albeit an absurd one, and leaves the reader with a bit of (unintentionally) deadpan comedy from Beau: “My sister says Ribbit’s fully ironic. I’d agree with that.”
5. Design your piece as a newspaper article. Invent a name for the paper. Have fun with a Latin motto. What illustrations/photography might strengthen the piece as fake news? Note Pablo’s pull quote. What quote might you highlight for added effect?

## Follow up

### *Full-on fake news*

Compile a satiric class newspaper. What other newspaper features could you include to break up the articles? Birth and death notices? Sports reports? Food columns? Comic strips? Astrological predictions? Weather forecasts? A saucy crossword puzzle? Letters to the editor? All of these are ripe for parody, both in content and style. Study these elements, then have fun with them. Don’t forget to consider the best sequencing.

### *Other platforms for satire*

Note down situations, obligations, notable people, rituals, media, or art forms that seriously get your goat or seem absurd. School assembly? Cross country? Authority figures? Media stars? Influencers? Family parties? School balls? Rhythmic gymnastics? Reality tv? Trombonists? Weird adult conversations? Romance novels? TikTokers?

Identify all the stand-out characteristics of this potentially satirical subject. This is your working material – the potent details you will exaggerate, present ironically, or juxtapose in comical ways.

Choose your form or platform. A zine, a short video, a potential YouTube post, a rap, a dramatic monologue, a song, a painting, a comic strip? Whichever form you choose, you’ll want to think about how the elements and tools of satire work best within your form.

Study some examples of satire within your form. Find a collaborator or several. Brainstorm together. Assign tasks according to skill sets. Set a deadline for presentation. Go!

### *Stripped-back satire*

Read the Old Dingus comic strips by Toby Morris in *Annual 3* (pages 8, 65, 93, and 121). These four strips are a gently satirical study of an uptight dad. Old Dingus's character is conveyed through examples of his domestic obsessiveness, his protectiveness, his exasperation with family slacking, his out-sized anxiety in regard to the daily round and being a parent. The comedy is in the exaggeration of a type we recognise. It's fundamentally a sympathetic piece of satire, fondly mocking.

Old Dingus's charming peculiarities are heightened by Toby Morris's clever contraction of his material. The strips are the visual equivalents of a tight poem or a flash fiction. Every image (and the few words) must count. They need to convey as much as possible, as efficiently as possible. Each frame is reduced to its important specifics (perspective, objects, stance, expression, gesture, relationships, action). And each frame distils a moment and an impression of movement, building to the punchline.

Try your own series of comic strips, using Old Dingus as a model. Four will do, and keep them to four frames each. Think of each strip as a ruthlessly condensed chapter in a story or four very short scenes in a drama. Plan the arc of this story across the four strips, then plan each strip's individual arc. Keep your dialogue to a minimum. Aim to show as much as possible visually.

Work in small groups. Team up with people who have complementary skills. You'll want someone who's good at thinking about the shape of story and scene, someone with good graphic skills, and a good editor (someone who can suggest how you might tighten or expand aspects of the strips). Don't forget a title.

Compile the class strips into a booklet or zine series.

### Thinking and discussing

Provide an opportunity for students to read “Gone Girls” before you focus on its narrative features. If possible, read the introduction and each story aloud.

How would you categorise the three stories? Do they resemble any other written form? In what kind of publication would you be likely to find written pieces like this?

- In fact, they’re most like the newspaper obituaries of people of “note”. They provide brief admiring biographies – the salient features from the lives of three (allegedly) forgotten female boss girls from 20th century Aotearoa. Check out some newspaper obituaries for comparison.

What are your immediate responses to the stories? Do they seem credible? If so, why? And which aspects in particular?

The writer is playing with certain assumptions.

- There are plenty of creative, entrepreneurial, and “successful” people (particularly women, perhaps) whose work has never been widely known or whose brief notability faded.
- There are plenty of hidden or unreported historical moments and achievements that come to light only decades later, often when historians or media go hunting for “unsung heroes”.
- We live in a time when the imbalance of the historical record is being addressed. The sovereignty of indigenous cultures is being acknowledged and elevated, and the injustices visited on black lives and the othering of subcultures (including LBGQ+) are being heavily questioned. It could make sense that the stories of heroic and entrepreneurial women are also being foregrounded and presented to young readers as role models, even beacons of hope.

The details of the women’s lives seem eminently plausible. There are sundry specificities sprinkled throughout that lend weight and authority. Identify these.

- The trajectories of their individual successes are convincing and pleasing. Hard work, perseverance, guts, and a touch of number-8 wire mentality are vital parts of their biographies, playing into fondly held NZ myths (our no-nonsense practicality; qualities that deserve success).
- Each of the “girls” are stereotypes (a doughty farm girl whose brains change her life; an ordinary but intrepid small-town hairdresser with a modest vision; a determined wāhine whose love of whānau spurs inventiveness).

Discuss the introduction. How does it further entrench the biographies' validity?

- It's in a register recognisable from much reputable media: newspaper intros, voiceovers for documentaries, tv news items, etc.
- It tweaks the reader's satisfaction at an oversight being righted.
- It's authoritative: emphatic, tightly expressed, and promises heart-warming revelations.

What aspects of the introduction and biographies might cast doubt on credibility?

- The very things that also work on the reader's credulity: the stereotyping of the subjects, the cultural rituals and iconography, the comfortable mythologies being played with.
- The double reading possible in the intro's final lines: "Three girls, three astonishing stories you've never heard. Until now ..."
- The unlikeliness (even absurdity) of their so-called achievements: agricultural espionage by means of hollowed-out Mills & Boons titles? A hair curl product whose secret ingredient was crushed biscuits? A jetpack that enabled solo flight in 1926?
- Big clue: The contents page of *Annual 3* categorises "Gone Girls" as satire!

What is being satirised in "Gone Girls"? Some (perhaps many) students will have read *Go Girls* and *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls* and similar titles from recent times. Find some story examples from those books and compare them with "Gone Girls".

Share the following publicity quotes:

"*Go Girl* is a collection of true stories about New Zealand women who have done extraordinary things. They strove for their goals. They weren't afraid to step up or speak out. They blazed a trail for others to follow. This book was written to show that YOU can join them!"

"This must-have volume brings readers on an empowering journey, introducing them to the real-life adventures of trailblazing women from Elizabeth I to Malala Yousafzai. The unique narrative style of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* transforms each biography into a fairytale, filling readers with wonder and a burning curiosity to know more about each hero. Each woman's story is also accompanied by a full-page, full-colour portrait that captures her rebel spirit."

One book was published here, the other in the US, but they share a similar intention: to present "hero" girls as inspirational role models to emulate. They also share similar features.

- The narrative mode is hearty and reductive: the shape and beats of the stories are identical (nearly always a heroic trajectory), from small beginnings to a glittering or noble future.
- They consistently emphasise qualities of single mindedness, unswerving determination, daring, tenacity, and moral incorruptibility (all estimable virtues, but eminently satirisable when served up in repetitive abundance).



Discuss the difference between parody and pastiche.

- Parody is the comical imitation (caricature) of a person, situation, or creative work. It exaggerates aspects of the subject for laughs.
- Pastiche is a literary (or other artistic) work that imitates the style of previous work. Unlike parody, pastiche celebrates the work it imitates rather than mocking it. It is not fundamentally satirical. Fan fiction is a contemporary example of pastiche.

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Is "Gone Girls" parody or pastiche?

- It's somewhere in between. It channels the style of the earlier books but more in parody than admiration (it doesn't obviously use the tools of parody, such as irony, hyperbole, etc.).
- It fuses social, cultural, and historical stereotypes with known facts and downright invention.
- It uses an abundance of cliché and beguiling specificity to both lure the reader and cast doubt on credibility. It rides a thin line between the plausible and the ridiculous.

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Organise the class into groups, assigning each group one of the three profiles. Ask students to identify points of doubt.

- The specific details, the clichés, the stereotypes, the NZ cultural generalisations, the absurdities amongst the more plausible elements of the text.
- Draw their attention to the girls' names. What clues do they provide to the author's true intent? (Espioner is a slight corruption of *espionner*, the French word for spy; Capelli is the Italian word for hair; Minnie Winiata's name has the word "win" buried in it – she's a "small winner").
- Have them sort the wheat (truth) from the chaff (invention). Suggest they research all the alleged facts and the biographical subjects for proof.
- Have each group report back to the larger class.

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Why are these profiles satire and not fake news?

- They're declared so on the contents page.
- They're entertainment aimed at challenging readers' critical reading and thinking, asking them to question what they read, not to take every text at face value.

## Writing and presenting

### *Slings and Arrows: committing satire*

Write a portrait/obituary of your own imaginary "heroic" success story. Use Melinda Arkle's portraits as a model. Imagine your person has faded from local history. Your piece is reminding folks of their achievements and legacy. You're aiming for a cunning mix of plausibility and absurdity.

1. Note as much as possible about this person and their context: early influences, the period in history they were active, family circumstances, personal qualities, lucky breaks, etc. You will only use some of this material, but it's good to have as comprehensive a sense of them as possible.
2. What did they achieve? Invent? Enable? A now obsolete motorised vegetable peeler? A controversial style of clothing? A game-changing synthetic chemical? A near-impossible gymnastic move? Were they a social/political activist? The leader of a new religion? An etymologist who discovered an insect with miraculous properties? Think outside the square.
3. The trick now is to persuade your reader that this person and their achievement were real. Note that Melinda Arkle uses *whānau* and domestic detail to flesh out her portraits.
4. Like Melinda, use a blend of facts and factoids. For example, cheap NZ wool did threaten South American sheep farming. The merindale breed is an invention. Thioglycolic acid and ammonia are perming solution ingredients (arrowroot biscuit is not). The distance between Hastings and Tokomaru Bay is indeed considerable, but the Koro Machine (jetpack) is fantastical. Also note the specificity of place in each piece. Period details and habits give a sense of authenticity (1980s hair styles, community dances in the 1920s, the foxtrot, the railcar, marrying the boy next door, film cannisters).
5. Note the use of Kiwi slang in the portraits, the use of cliché and stereotype, and the "reporting" style and register (including declarative sentences such as "It takes organisation to follow your dream", "He was moving with the times", "Students were nothing compared with bolshie ewes").
6. Write no more than 350 words. Economy is your friend. Make every word count. Analyse some of Melinda's paragraphs. Notice how tight they are yet how much information she manages to convey.
7. What's your subtitle/headline? Melinda's both essentialise her portraits and invite you to read them.
8. Exchange first drafts with a classmate and suggest edits. This is an opportunity to have another reader's thoughts on your piece and to practice your own editing skills.
9. Organise a class reading of this new pantheon of rediscovered heroes!

## Follow up

### *Good kai*

Study “The Traditional Big Spread of Aotearoa NZ” (p. 136). It’s modelled on the well-known commercial fish species poster ([unitedfisheries.co.nz/content/new-zealand-commercial-fish-species](http://unitedfisheries.co.nz/content/new-zealand-commercial-fish-species)), which features a lavish display of the fish found in NZ waters, complete with common and scientific names. The latter designations are in Latin, according to the international binomial nomenclature codes (look it up!): Hoki (*Macruronus novaezelandiae*), Tarakihi (*Nemadactylus macropterus*), Monkfish (*Kathetostoma giganteum*) ...

Big Spread is a light-hearted satire of both the fish poster and scientific classification systems. It uses irony and juxtaposition for comic effect. Savoury and sweet foods are displayed as if they were members of a species (party food!), which is well outside normal expectations (irony). The food items are given their common name and a fake scientific name in a phoney Latin (juxtaposition). On closer inspection, each Latin term reveals a comically disguised, semi-English description of some facet of the food. For example, the sausage roll is *Rollipolli carnitas* (roughly, meat-rolled-in-pastry). The stuffed egg is *Ovo burpus* (egg concoction that can make you belch). The brandy snap is *Pipus tuthrotta* (pipe-shaped saccharine treat that might destroy your teeth).

Create your own taxonomy on a poster. Apply “scientific” nomenclature to a set of items (or humans) for comic effect. Underwear? Fashion accessories? Sporting codes? Furniture? School subjects? Instruments? Sneakers?

- Form groups of students with different skill sets (artists, writers, ideas people, designers).
- Brainstorm ideas for your “species”.
- Study Giselle Clarkson’s “dog” Latin terms. They’re funny and clever. She throws around Latin suffixes (-us, -ana, -oid, -era, etc.). Every so often, she uses an actual Latin word (*lepidoptera* means butterfly), but mostly she’s comically faux-Latinising her English.
- Work out your “scientific” names and play around with Latinised versions. Do a quick search for basic Latin grammar to get a sense of how it sounds and looks ([nationalarchives.gov.uk/latin/stage-1-latin/resources/stage-1-latin-grammar-resource](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/latin/stage-1-latin/resources/stage-1-latin-grammar-resource)).
- Mount an exhibition of your finished posters.