

# The Whale Rider

# IGCSE Revision

A Lesson for **IGCSE Literature in English**

Edexcel 4ET1

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# Assessment Objectives

# Assessment Objectives

- **AO1:** Demonstrate a close knowledge and understanding of texts, maintaining a critical style and presenting an informed personal engagement.
- **AO4:** Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

# Past questions

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# Past paper questions

- 'Koro Apirana is a cruel and heartless character in The Whale Rider.' How far do you agree with this view? You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.
- Explore the significance of the legend of the whale rider in the novel. You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.
- Discuss the importance of leadership in The Whale Rider. You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.
- In what ways is change important in the novel? You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.
- Explore one character who, in your opinion, has great power in The Whale Rider. You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

# Past paper questions

- 'But this time ... I'm really going to divorce him.' (Nanny/Nani Flowers) How is marriage presented in the novel? You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.
- Discuss the significance of the bull whale and his herd in The Whale Rider. You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.
- Explore the theme of love in The Whale Rider. You must consider the context of the novel in your answer
- 'The whales are very important characters in this novel.' How far do you agree with this view? You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

# Essay structure

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# Option #1

- Introduction
- Beginning
- Middle
- Ending
- Conclusion

# Option #2

- Introduction
- At first,
- Then,
- However,
- Conclusion

# Option #3

- Introduction
- At first,
- Then,
- Ultimately,
- Conclusion

**Example paragraph**

# AO1 & AO4

Throughout the novel, the reader sees Kahu mature from a precocious and chatty child who happily monologues at Rawiri to becoming a wiser person, ready to take her “rightful place”. This is shown through Kahu’s returning journey to her tribe on the back of the Ancient Bull Whale. As a result, the “partnership between land and sea, whales and all humankind” is restored. This journey is both literal and metaphorical; Kahu’s return from sea to land signals a new age and hope for her Māori tribe but also resolves many of the troubles facing humanity as a result of their loss of “oneness”, or disconnection from the natural world. This idea can also be shown structurally, as this novel is written in the genre of magical realism and is narrated by two distinct voices: the everyday realism of Rawiri’s perspective and the magical and lyrical perspective of the whales. However, by the end of the novel, as Kahu makes her journey and restores “oneness”, these two voices are no longer separated into different chapters as they were previously but now are interspersed and complement each other as the story reaches its denouement. Kahu’s journey has made this oneness possible and granted the prayer of “haumi e, hui e, taiki e. Let it be done”, restoring the connection of the Māori people to their ancient land.

# Context



# Key context points:

- Ihimaera's work
- Māori culture and customs
- Nature and the environment
- Men and women
- Racism and colonialism

# Ihimaera's work

- The novel is in the magical realism genre, which combines features of both magic/fantasy with realism. This can be seen through the fantastical elements of the novel, like Kahu speaking with whales, and the realistic elements, like Rawiri visiting Bondi Beach in Australia.
- Ihimaera was inspired to write *The Whale Rider* after his two young daughters complained that the heroic characters in the books that they had read were all male. The daughters wanted a story with a heroic female character. Both Kahu and Nanny Flowers could therefore be read as role models for Ihimaera's daughters.



# Maori culture & customs

- Burying Kahu's birth cord is a traditional Māori ceremony that symbolises her connection to her homeland.
- Paikea is a real Māori myth and the ancestor of the Ngati Porou tribe that Kahu belongs to. He apparently brought the Māori people from Hawaiki to New Zealand Aotearoa. Paikea was also known as **Kahutia** te Rangi.
- **Porou**rangi is also named after another famous ancestor. The Ngati Porou tribe is named after him.
- Kahu is represented as the last spear that Kahu threw, which waited until it was truly needed.

# Maori culture & customs

- The Māori Language is used very frequently. The repeated Māori phrase, 'hui e, haumi e, taiki e' (join everything together, bind it together, let it be done) is central to the desire of bringing the natural world and humans together again.
- Koro takes his role as chief seriously and tries to preserve Māori traditions and fight for Māori people in court and land disputes. These were all serious issues at the time – and still are.
- Rawiri spends some time in Bondi, a part of the Australian city of Sydney. At the time, this place was known for the large amount of Māori people living there. Rawiri discusses how these Māori struggle to reconcile their identities with their tribes.

# Nature & the environment

- The 80s and 90s were an important period of environmentalism in NZ. There were a lot of protests against nuclear energy and nuclear bomb testing in the Pacific. At the end of the book, it mentioned that the whales have been affected by this testing at Moruroa.
- The 80s and 90s were also an important period of protest against Whaling. New Zealand and other countries led a movement to ban it internationally. NZ was a founding member of the International Whaling Commission IWC.
- The book is structured as four seasons to connect to the cyclical journey of life.

# Men & women



- Māori culture is male-dominated, but Kahu and Nanny challenge this.
- Both Mihi Kotukutuku and Muriwai are real Māori women who took on leadership roles in their tribes. Nanny Flowers proudly mentions both of them in the novel.
- Koro is disappointed when Kahu is born because his tribe has a male line of descent for their chiefs. However, plenty of Māori women have been chiefs. 13 female chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi with the British settlers.

# Racism & colonialism

- Rawiri witnesses and experiences racism as an outsider in Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea was briefly a protectorate of Australia and a lot of white people came to exploit its resources and people. Jeff's mother even refers to Rawiri as "too dark".
- The novel refers to New Zealand by its Māori name Aotearoa, which means the land of the long white cloud.



# Ihimaera's intentions

# Ihimaera's intentions

- Emphasizing the importance of gender equality, with a female protagonist breaking cultural norms.
- Highlighting the struggle between tradition and modernity in preserving cultural identity.
- Exploring the deep bond between people and their ancestral land, particularly in indigenous cultures.
- Addressing generational conflict, showcasing the gap between old traditions and new worldviews.
- Portraying the power of leadership coming from unexpected places, challenging preconceived notions of authority.

# Ihimaera's intentions

- Ihimaera offers a voice for the hope that tradition and modernity can coexist while preserving culture in a post-colonial world.
- Ihimaera warns that being too narrowly focused on the past can be dangerous when the whale tribe become stranded on the beach and almost die as a result of the paralysing pessimism caused by being too fixated on what came before you and not on where you will go next.
- Ihimaera offers a world in which there is space for both the old and the new, for men and for women, for nature and humanity, for magic and realism – in other words, for “oneness”.



# Characters

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# Kahu

- Represents the strength of female leadership, generational change, and the preservation of cultural identity.
- Challenges gender roles
- Bridges the old world and new, becoming the hope for future generation – “oneness”
- Connection to the whale and her ancestors symbolizes cultural continuity.
- Sacrifice – “I’m not afraid to die”



# Rawiri



- Represents the challenges of modernity, the search for self-identity, and reconnection to heritage.
- Narrator of the novel – distance from Kahu
- His journey reflects the difficulties of balancing Western and Māori influences.
- Rawiri's journey shows a man's quest for belonging and understanding.
- Eventually reclaims his Māori roots

# Koro

- Koro represents the rigid adherence to tradition, the struggle for male authority, and generational conflict – but is capable of change.
- Determined to preserve Māori customs (language school), often rejecting change.
- His rigid views clash with the younger, more open-minded generation.
- Koro's journey reflects a broader theme of reconciling tradition with modernity
- Resolves the paradox of tradition vs modernity, creating “**oneness**” at the end of the novel



# Nani Flowers



- Nani Flowers represents wisdom, nurturing love, and bridging the gap between generations.
- Offers guidance and patience, especially in supporting Kahu's growth and role.
- Provides a loving environment, counterbalancing Koro's harshness.
- Embraces change while honouring tradition, helping Kahu's path as a leader and Koro to realise his mistakes.
- Female leadership and role model with her "Muriwai blood"

# Porourangi

- Highlights the struggle between maintaining cultural traditions and adapting to new realities
- Eldest son and expected to continue the line of male chiefs. Inability to produce a male heir challenges these traditional expectations.
- Tension between modernity & tradition; symbolises a shift in cultural norms. His acceptance of Kahu's potential as a leader indicates his openness to change.
- Committed to his family; loves and supports Kahu, even when Koro Apirana does not. Balance between respecting his father's wishes and nurturing his own family.



# The Bull Whale & family



- Represent the spiritual connection to the natural world and ancestral legacy.
- The whales symbolizes the link between the Māori people and the spirit world: “if the whale lives, we live”
- The whale's return marks the fulfilment of Kahu’s destiny, reuniting her with her roots.
- Their role in the story emphasizes the importance of respecting nature and its power.
- Parallel to Koro – both Bull Whale and Koro are at the ends of their life – lost, stuck in the past.



# Jeff & family

- Represent ignorance and intolerance of white ex-pats of indigenous people
- Jeff's mum racist to Rawiri – “dogs and strays”
- Jeff and his friends kill a “native” in a hit and run – helps Rawiri to understand his vulnerability and return home to New Zealand
- Help us to understand why preserving Māori culture is so important – a safe space in a world full of prejudice and racism





# Themes



# Themes

Transformation	Nature	Gender	Leadership
Represents personal and cultural evolution, as seen in Kahu's journey and the community's shift towards embracing new roles and ideas.	Symbolises the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of living in harmony with the environment, as demonstrated by Kahu's bond with the whales.	Highlights the challenge of overcoming traditional gender roles, emphasising the potential for women to lead and contribute equally to society.	Explores the qualities necessary for effective leadership, suggesting that true leaders are those who can unite people and respect both tradition and innovation.

# Themes

Colonialism & identity	Spirituality & supernatural	Tradition vs modernity	Generational conflict
Reflects the tension between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary life, urging a balance that honours the past while embracing the future.	Illustrates the deep spiritual connections within Māori culture, where the supernatural is intertwined with everyday life, guiding and influencing the community.	Examines the impact of colonization on Māori identity, advocating for cultural revival and self-determination as means of reclaiming power and place in society.	Depicts the struggles between older and younger generations, highlighting the need for mutual understanding and respect to achieve progress and unity.

# Form and structure

# Kahu's coming-of-age arc



Grows into a strong, capable leader. Her ability to communicate with whales signifies a fulfilment of prophecy and a reversal of cultural decline. Her maturity is evident in her forgiveness of Koro's behaviour and her understanding of Māori culture.

- Shows talent and leadership potential at her school graduation.
- Attempts to retrieve the rock from the sea out of concern for Koro.
- Communicates with whales, fulfilling an important prophecy.

# Koro's character arc

Gradual change in perspective.

Initially, he is bound by traditional views that favour male leadership. However, he eventually recognizes Kahu's worth and abilities, embracing her as the best grandchild.

- Initially shuns Kahu due to her gender.
- Cries when potential male chiefs fail his test, showing vulnerability.
- Ultimately accepts and loves Kahu, acknowledging her as a leader.



# Repetition of prayer

- "Hui e, haumi e, taiki e" loosely translates to "Let it be done," is traditionally used to conclude rituals, prayers, or speeches.
- By ending chapters with this chant, Ihimaera underscores the interconnectedness of the characters and their shared destiny. Highlights the novel's themes of unity and the importance of returning to one's roots, as seen in Kahu's ability to communicate with the whales.
- Also reflects the broader metaphor of the Māori Renaissance, symbolizing a cultural revival and a return to traditional values



# Parallel narratives that converge



- **Parallel Narratives:** The novel intertwines the stories of humans and whales to highlight their interconnectedness and mutual dependence.
- **Plot Convergence:** The narratives converge when Kahu communicates with the ancient whale, symbolizing the restoration of balance between humans and nature.
- Language also converges – italicized whale writing and poetic style seen in the final chapter



# Parallel narratives that converge

Suddenly, in the joyous melee, Kahu raised a finger to her lips:  
*Sssshh.*

*The ancient bull whale breached the surface, leaping high into the moonlit sky. The sacred sign, the tattoo, was agleam like liquid silver. The bull whale flexed his muscles, releasing Kahu, and she felt herself tumbling along his back, tumbling, tumbling, tumbling. All around her the whales were leaping, and the air was filled with diamond spray.*

‘Can’t you hear them?’ Kahu asked. *Interlock.*

*She fell into the sea. The thunder of the whales departing was loud in her ears. She opened her eyes and looked downward. Through the foaming water she could see huge tail fins waving farewell, ‘Child, farewell.’*

*Then from the backwash of Time came the voice of the old mother whale. ‘Child, your people await you. Return to the Kingdom of Tane and fulfil your destiny.’ And suddenly the sea was drenched again with a glorious echoing music from the dark shapes sounding.*

Kahu looked at Koro Apirana, her eyes shining.

‘Oh *Paka*, can’t you hear them? I’ve been listening to them for ages now. Oh *Paka*, and the whales are still singing,’ she said.

Haumi e, hui e, *taiki e*.

Let it be done.

## “Oneness”

# Structured into seasons

- Structured into four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter – then epilogue
- Suggests the inevitable passing of time, like Kahu's coming-of-age arc
- Modernity and the future are impossible to stop
- Must change with the times but find a way to preserve culture and identity with this



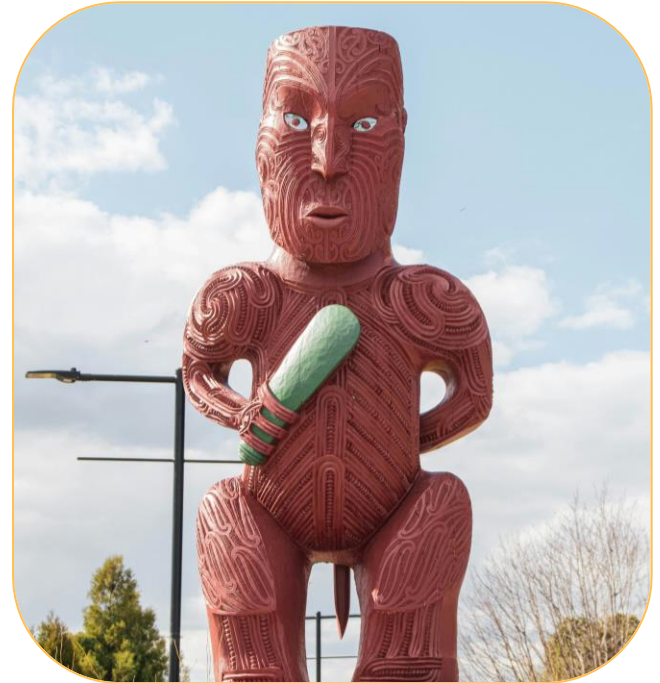
# Narrative perspective



- Told from perspective of Rawiri, Kahu's uncle, and the whales
- Gives distance – allows us to see Kahu's growth through his eyes
- Observer, more objective and balanced
- Increases magic – we observe Kahu's connection from nature as an awed observer
- Leaves Whangara – perspective of wider world
- Also grows to be someone deeply connected with culture when he returns – inspired by Koro and Kahu
- Reflective tone – told past tense, retrospective

# Poetic and colloquial language

- Rawiri's sections narrated using everyday colloquial language
- Whale sections narrated using elevated poetic language rich in metaphor with many Māori phrases
- Represents tradition vs modernity – but resolved by the end of the novel when these two styles converge
- Represents genre of **magic realism**



# Use of Māori language



- **Māori renaissance** - cultural revival movement that sought to reclaim and celebrate Māori identity and traditions
- Preservation of language and culture – e.g. Koro sets up Māori language schools
- Resistance against colonization – but more optimistic, shows what has been lost can be regained
- Embracing heritage rather than assimilating into dominant (white) culture

# Paradoxes resolve

Tradition / Modernity	Our relationship to nature
<p>Tradition and modernity have to blend together.</p> <p>"She was Kahutia Te Rangi. She was Paikea. She was the whale rider." Shows Kahu is the <b>bridge</b> between tradition and modernity.</p> <p>Example: burying of the birth cord. Tradition - only Māori males have their birth cord buried but Nanny Flowers buries Kahu's anyway - following tradition but with a modern perspective.</p>	<p>We must <b>conserve</b> and <b>protect</b> nature, especially whales, which were hunted and the Whale Hunting ban had just been enacted.</p> <p>Humans must learn to live in harmony with nature.</p> <p>"The whale herd sang their gladness that tribe would also live" --&gt; both can survive together, <b>mutual</b> relationship, rely on each other.</p> <p>Nature is <b>parallel</b> to the tribe: book's structure alternating between the tribe's life and the whales - both reflect each other - how connected they are.</p> <p>Also parallels: Koro/The Ancient Bull Whale and Nanny Flowers/Old Mother Whale</p>

# Paradoxes resolve

Gender	Colonialism / Identity
<p>Gender doesn't dictate who you can be.</p> <p>Possible to be both a woman and a leader – like Kahu, Nani Flowers and Muriwai.</p> <p>E.g. at the end, Koro accepts Kahu as the leader of the tribe and apologises for his behaviour to her at the start of the novel. "You are the best grandchild in the whole world. Being a girl doesn't matter."</p> <p>Everyone can learn to change (eventually)</p>	<p>Identity is incredibly important and should be protected at all costs - both the whales and the Māori tribe</p> <p>Could disappear, become extinct (identity, language could die out, not just the whales)</p> <p>Māori tribe can recover from the damage of colonialism - Māori people can survive, thrive, recover their way of life (but now it will have to be in harmony with the modern world)</p> <p>Whale also finds his own identity: always mourning loss of golden rider but after he meets Kahu this resolves his issues with identity and loss of direction.</p>



# Symbols & motifs



# Symbols and motifs

- Oneness
- The birth cord
- Paikea's spear
- The stone Kahu retrieves
- The motorbike
- Murawai blood
- Whale song

# Oneness



- Koro says that humans have lost their “**oneness**” with nature through abusing their environment.
- The whole novel is about the journey to restore this oneness, humans with nature, tradition with modernity, realism with magic.

# Birth cord

- This Māori tradition symbolises a powerful connection between past and present, reality and fantasy.
- Kahu's "**birth cord**" that Nanny Flowers buries, showing her willingness to defy Koro's patriarchal views.
- It serves as a reminder of the "**oneness**" that the world once had.
- The cord joins different realms—both real and unreal, natural and supernatural. It also foreshadows Kahu's return to Whangara and her journey towards becoming the tribal leader.



# Paikea's spear



- The “**spear**” that Paikea throws into the future, based on a true Māori legend.
- The spear symbolises the Māori people’s special connection to the past and the enduring power of tradition in the modern day.

# Stone



- The “**stone**” that Kahu retrieves from the bottom of the sea, representing both that she is destined to become the future leader of the tribe, but also that Nanny Flowers recognises that Koro wasn’t ready to change at that point in the novel.
- Nanny Flowers gently brings Koro along at his own pace, showing even the most traditional can embrace modernity if we bring them along with us rather than reject them as incapable of change.

# Motorbike

- When Nanny Flowers rides Rawiri's "**motorbike**", a symbol of her willingness to embrace change, adventure and modernity.
- Not only this, but motorbikes are often seen as more masculine, so it could represent how Nanny Flowers is willing to challenge gender roles and patriarchy.



# Murawai blood

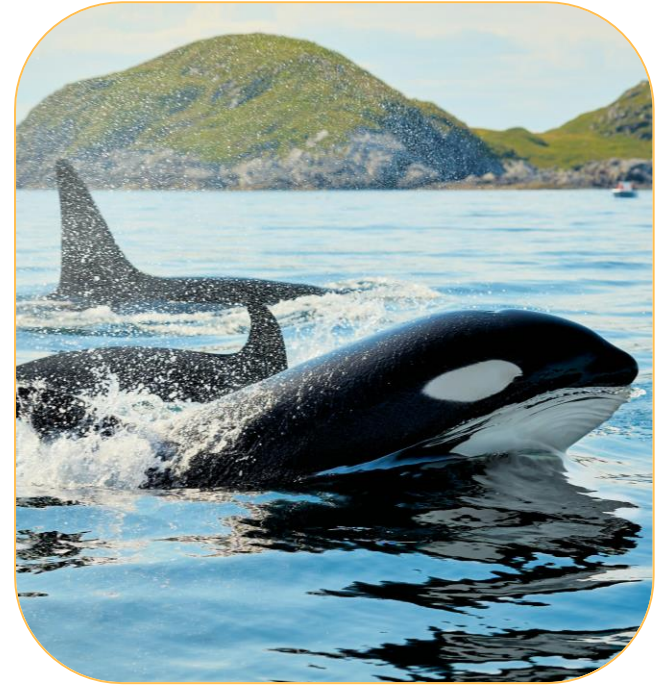


- Nanny Flowers' "**Muriwai blood**" represents that women are capable of being strong leaders too.
- It's not against tradition to have a female leader, as strong and successful female leaders have existed in Māori tribes prior to Kahu.



# Whale song

- In *Whale Rider*, whale song symbolizes a deep, ancestral connection to nature, spirituality, and the Maori people's heritage.
- It represents ancestral wisdom, serving as a link to the past and carrying the voices and traditions of the ancestors.
- It also symbolizes cultural continuity, echoing the persistence of Maori culture despite modernity.
- The whale's song reflects a spiritual connection between the Maori people and the natural world, especially the ocean.
- Additionally, it foreshadows Kahu's leadership, highlighting her profound and transcendent bond to her heritage.





# Key quotations

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# Key quotations – natural world

- “contamination” and “the effects of the undersea radiation” In the novel, the herd of whales are mourning the death of some calves that are killed as a result of a nuclear test at Moruroa.
- “hairline fractures indicating serious damage”
- “flash of bright light” relevance of context (1987 nuclear testing).
- “The rain was like spears..” p100
- “suddenly shards of ice began to cascade like spears around the herd” p78
- “The whale is still alive....working on the whale...triumphant....the men are laughing as they wrench the jaw from the butchered whale” p80

# Key quotations – communication

- “old paka” (p11). Insulting yet endearing.
  - “I won’t have anything to do with her” p12 Koro Apirana re Kahu
  - “I’m really going to divorce him” (sarcasm)
  - “Yeah, yeah, yeah” repetition, monosyllabic, dismissive (Koro to Nani)
  - “He’ll come around’. The trouble was, though, that he never did.” p27 Nani/
- Narrator
  - “You’re right, dear. I’ve been no good.” p118 Koro
  - “His face was fill with understanding.” p118
  - “...this time he was genuinely relieved to see her” p87 Rawiri our narrator noticing Koro’s change towards Nani after the violence towards the whales.

## Key quotations – identity

- “You know what the natives are like, always drinking” p51 Jeff’s mother demonstrating prejudice re Jeff going to Papua New Guinea.
- “...eaten up by all them cannibals” p52 Nani Flowers re Rawiri going to Papua New Guinea; prejudice against another marginalised group
- “I was still too dark” – p53
- “Māori cousins” – Rawiri about Māori diaspora – community overseas
- “They weren’t embarrassed, but hiding the way they lived was one way of maintaining the respect...” p49 (Rawiri describing his cousins re their personal renaming in Australia)

# Key quotations – gender and leadership

- “Girls can do anything these days”  
Nani Flowers - she hopes that he sees the error of his ways and eventually makes Koro accept Kahu
- “disgusted...She has broken the male line of descent in our tribe...” p10 Koro
- “I will have nothing to do with her” p10 Koro
- “Your Muriwari blood,’ Koro Apirana said. ‘Always too strong for me.” p120
- “the spear, soaring in the sky, came to rest in the earth where the afterbirth of a female child would be placed.” p114
- “I am not afraid to die,’ she whispered to herself” p107  
(martyrdom - the suffering of death on account of adherence to a cause and especially to one's religious faith)

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