

New Zealand School Journals, 1960s-70s

Commentary by Tina White

In this commentary, Tina White draws on her collection of the New Zealand School Journal to illustrate how by the 1960s and 1970s the Journal commissioned content from some of the country's best writers, illustrators and photographers. Founded in 1907 with the high-minded aim to develop among New Zealand schoolchildren an "appreciation of the higher literature", it is believed to be the longest running serial publication for children in the world with around 750,000 copies published annually in four parts. Athol McCredie, who writes on the New Zealand photobook in this issue, once described the New Zealand School Journal as an element of New Zealanders' cultural consciousness – "remembered as evocatively as the smell of stale school milk, the feel of chalk and finger paint, and the steamy atmosphere of a classroom of wet bodies on a rainy day".

- and *Pekalo the Demon* (a folk story of Tonga, illustrated by Roger Hart in Part Two, Number 1, 1972). Non-New Zealand authors and poets are featured in the Part Two Number 2 issue: *The Pelican Chorus* by Edward Lear, *Winter* by Christina Rossetti and *Armies in the Fire* by Robert Louis Stevenson. The variety of reading material was (and still is) surprising: from stories and poems, photos, documentaries, travelogues and songs to playlets and pantomimes.

Children with disabilities were beginning to be seen, like the little girl with legs that 'don't work' in *To School in the Pram* by Alison Greenwood, illustrated by Graham Percy, (Part Two, Number 3). Real-life family situations were also appearing in storylines. Women were still portrayed primarily as mothers in aprons, but some stories were mentioning working mums. A poignant story by Mona Williams: *You really saw my father?* (Part 3, Number One, 1976) features a black family whose husband and father has, seemingly, abandoned them. The two children miss their father. They live with their mother and grandmother, who run a cake shop. When a visitor says he has seen their father in England, the brother and sister are wild to find out anything about him. They can't understand why their mother is so angry at this, but gradually come to realise how hard she must work to support them.

The New Zealand School Journal is still very much alive, and still enjoyed by a new generation of schoolchildren. The books are grouped into age levels: 7-8 years, 8-9 years, 9-11 years and 11-14 years. Since 2013 it has been published by Lift Education for its client the Ministry of Education, in addition to Ready to Read and Connected. Contributors still include well-known New Zealand authors, illustrators and photographers.



School Journal Part 2, No. 8: Conrad Frieboe, illustration for Hazel Hill's story: "Windfall." 1968



School Journal Part 2, No. 2, 1969: Trevor Plaisted cover illustration of Captain Cook



Photo essay: "Power from Maraetai" School Journal Pt 2, Number 2, 1968. Photos by Ans Westra, story by Noel Hilliard