

## BLM 5 – *The Power of Words*

The beginning chapters of the novel *The Whale Rider* are rich with figurative language, Māori words and typography. In this activity you are asked to consider the author’s choice of words (diction) and the visual component of the written word (typography). You may think font and font size but typography is more than just fonts. Typography is about design of the visual and written space and it includes line spacing, line length, point size, and many other aspects.

Words are a writer’s tools:

- they set the tone and determine the level of formality
- they shape the readers’/listeners’ perceptions
- they help create characters and transmit viewpoints

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With a partner, read the sentences or passages from the novel and discuss the guided questions together. Record your response (in point form or complete sentences) on separate paper.

- A. “In the old days, in the years that have gone before us, the land and sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains were like a stairway to heaven, and the lush green rainforest was a *rippling* cloak of many colors.” (p.3).
- By using the word “rippling,” what does the author imply about the rainforest? What images do you visualize?
  - If the word rippling was changed to foreboding, what effect would it have on the meaning of the sentence? What color(s) could be associated with the rainforest now?
- B. “He was wondrous to look upon, the whale rider. The water streamed away from him and he opened his mouth to gasp in the cold air. His eyes were shining with splendour. His body dazzled with diamond spray” (p.6).
- What picture is created by the use of the word diamond? What do you imagine the whale rider looks like?
  - Discuss how your perception of the whale rider would change if the last sentence read “His body dazzled with salt spray.”
- C. “So the Whale Rider uttered a prayer over the wooden spear, saying, “Let this spear be planted in years to come, for there are sufficient spear already implanted. Let this be the one to flower when the people are troubled, and it is most needed” (p.6).
- What does the author mean by the phrase “in the years to come?” Give two synonyms for the phrase.
- D. “The sound was plangent and sad as he tried to communicate his oneness with the young whale’s mourning. Quite without the musician knowing it, the melodic patterns of the

flute's phrases imitated the whale song of comfort. The young whale drew nearer to the human, who cradled him and pressed noses with the orphan in greeting" (p.11).

- In what ways is it possible to communicate oneness with another person?
  - Why do you think the whale and the human press noses?
  - Why do you think Ihimaera does not use the Māori word *hongi* in this chapter despite its use later in the novel?
- E. What do you think the use of *italics* signifies? Why do you think Chapter 2 and 5 are written entirely in *italics*? What words are *italicized* in the novel? What evidence can you use to support your prediction about the use of *italics*?
- F. "As the years had burgeoned, the happiness of those days was like a siren call to the ancient bull whale" (p.12).
- A simile is the comparison of two unlike things using the words like or as. What two things are being compared? What does the author's use of the term siren call convey?