



Taonga

Curriculum level

Level 3

Unit duration

Eight to ten sessions

The big question

"What can precious taonga teach us about who we are?"

Overall direction

In role as historians, students explore clues contained in a family's treasured documents and use those clues to construct the family's story.

Learning outcomes

The students will:

- * establish and sustain the role of historians who work together to uncover a family's history from fictional documents and present their findings in a way that suits the context (PK, DI, CI, UC);
- * in groups, select conventions to depict a significant moment from the co-constructed story and present it to others (PK, DI, CI, UC);
- * view each other's presentations and discuss the use of conventions and techniques and the overall impact of the performances (CI).

Links with other learning areas

English: Oral, Written, and Visual Language: The students examine a set of written texts and use drama to communicate their response to those texts.

Social Studies: Time, Continuity, and Change: The students explore what people today can learn about the past through a set of records.

Assessment example

Ask the students to evaluate each other's presentations, considering aspects such as their use of techniques and the overall impact.

Source

The set of documents (see pages 54–62)
Photocopy enough for each group to have one set.

Pretext

The first letter from Jim McKenzie asking for help

Conventions

Blanket role, teacher in role, defining space, role-in-role, and others as selected by the students

Resources

Books and other resources for the library and display table
A clipboard
Sketches of Māori artefacts



Teaching and learning sequence

Possible dialogue

Introduction

Discuss the concept of taonga and the sorts of things that members of the various cultures represented in the class might value as precious.

Negotiating the roles: Blanket role and teacher in role

Gather information about the things historians do and the skills they need. Establish with the students that what historians do is gather information about the past. Establish also that to do this, they need to have good research skills, including the ability to ask good questions and follow their questions up, recognise and examine clues, analyse information, and be accurate.

Tell the students that, in the drama, you will all be historians who belong to a local historical society.

Give the students plastic nametags, and ask them to write, on the tags, some details about their particular area of historical study. Give them each a small piece of paper, ask them to write the name of or draw something they treasure on it, and then slip it in behind the nametag. Nobody will see this, but they will keep it in their possession at all times – it is their own personal taonga.

Defining the space

Work with the students to define the dramatic space. Tell them that the space for the drama will be the meeting room of the historical society and that you need to make the space as authentic as possible. Take this process of defining the space slowly and allow a lot of discussion. Once the space is established, the students are likely to get into role as soon as they enter the room and will only need a brief review to refocus and re-engage in the activity.

Get the students to suggest names for the historical society. Take all their suggestions and then narrow them down to a smaller number for voting.

Teacher in role as president of the historical society

Announce that you will be in role as the president of the society. Get the students to go outside the door, and then invite them to enter the room. Convene the meeting in role as the president. Reinforce your role by carrying a clipboard and starting with some welcoming small talk.

Pretext

Read the letter from Jim McKenzie asking for help to interpret the mystery of the documents he has discovered (document 1).

What do historians do? What are they good at? What might they study? What jobs might they do?

I'm going to be in the drama, too, and we'll be doing work about New Zealand history.

How will the room be arranged? Will we need more tables? Where are the reference books? Is there a display area? Could we make a historical society noticeboard? What sorts of notices might be on historical society noticeboards? Perhaps a notice about a trip coming up – or a map of an area that someone recommends for visiting? Maybe an invitation to the opening of an exhibition at a nearby museum?

Good evening. I'm glad so many of you could come to this month's meeting. It's good to see you here after your trip away, Peter.

I've just received something intriguing. I've been sent this letter – and with it a bundle of other documents – and the writer wants our help in working out what they're about. I haven't had time to read them closely, but it looks like a real mystery.



Ask the students to examine the letter in groups of four and then to share their group's ideas and questions with the rest of the historical society.

Ask the groups to examine the speech from John McKenzie at his wedding anniversary and the letter from Hana (documents 2 and 3). Ask them for their theories about the dispute over the road, why the great-grandfather never crossed the bridge, and about the help Māori gave the family. It's best to develop this work over a series of sessions, taking breaks to suit your programme. Once the students' interest is aroused, they may want to continue their research and discussions out of drama time.

Give each group a set of the next five documents (documents 4–8). Ask them to collect information, speculate further on the story, and collate their information. There are many trails for them to explore. Your job is to help collate the information they uncover and summarise the issues from within your role as president. The summary could be in the form of a chart on the wall, a family tree, or the recording of minutes.

Teacher in role as Jim McKenzie

Put on a hat and jacket and enter in role as Jim McKenzie, who has come to find out how the historians' work is proceeding. (If you prefer, you could ask another adult to play the role, or you could introduce McKenzie's second letter instead – document 9.) As Jim McKenzie, you can press for more information and thoughts about the crossed-out names, the disagreement over the land and the road, and why his ancestor would have put the documents away. You can drop hints to get the class to consider clues they haven't worked on and use questioning to lead the students towards the issues that are important for the theme (particularly the reference to the knoll that the local Māori people wouldn't go near). The more time you give to this process, the more thoughtful and detailed the speculation will be. Finally, ask the historians whether they could present some of the most significant moments of your family's story at an upcoming reunion. Ask them to present it the way you've seen at some museums – as a display that comes to life when a button is pushed.

What sort of things does the letter say? What clues are there – and what puzzles would you like to know more about?

What have you found out about the knoll? Why wouldn't his family go near it?

And my great-grandfather who never crossed the river ... it bothers me, but I thought you people might be able to shed a bit of light on it.

Why do you think my ancestor put the documents away? Did he want them to be found, or was he hiding them for another reason?



Presenting moments from the family's past: role-in-role

In their groups, the historians choose the moments they will present and plan and rehearse them based on the historical information they have gathered from the documents.

The moments could include:

- ✱ the opening of the road, based on the newspaper report (document 7);
- ✱ a scene incorporating the family Bible and hinting at the issues in the family;
- ✱ the moment when the documents were hidden under the floorboards;
- ✱ Rose visiting her grandmother and the questions that she asks.

They could select and use conventions in their presentation, for example:

- ✱ speaking thoughts aloud or thought tapping;
- ✱ movement for ten seconds into (or beyond) the freeze frame;
- ✱ guided depiction – one student can step out and explain the moment.

Hold the reunion on the farm and enact the presentations in a place of special significance. Again, take on the role of Jim McKenzie and question the students within the drama, getting them to identify how they have created meaning.

Reflection

Following the presentations, the students could discuss and evaluate each group's work. They could go on to review the ideas and issues covered, returning to the big question about taonga and reviewing the story that they have co-constructed from the documents. Their story will contain significant ideas, items, and places that you can relate back to their original understandings about taonga.

How well did this group convey the feelings and attitudes of the people they were portraying?

What was the central issue in the story? What items did the people value and why?

