

NIGHT TRIBE

Peter Butler

Night Tribe

by Peter Butler

About the author

Author of two non-fiction titles: *Opium & Gold*, the story of the early Chinese goldminers in NZ and *Life & Times of Te Rauparaha* – the story of the famous warrior as told by his son Tamihana. His first novel, *Gravel Roads*, was published in 2010 and was well reviewed. He lived for many years on a bush block near the Heaphy Track, and still has a farm there growing horopito commercially, though he now lives in Nelson. His first job in the Bay was working on the Heaphy Track for the Forest Service, so he knows it well. He also knows what native flora and fauna can be used for, which is incorporated into the story.

He is the Chair of the Farewell Wharariki HealthPost Nature Trust, helping to restore 12,000 hectares at the NW tip of the South Island.

Synopsis of novel

This is the delightful story of a brother and sister who get lost whilst seeking help for their injured mother, after they have taken a side path from the Heaphy Track. Taken in by the Night Tribe, a strange community living in the cave network underneath the Kahurangi National Park, Millie and Toby soon discover they are in fact prisoners.

Whilst narrating their various (and eventually successful) attempts to escape back to civilisation, the book explores the range of social and environmental issues that have caused these people to withdraw so totally from human society.

Themes / issues

The primary two themes in this novel are both related to the human tendency to destroy. Both the way **humans treat each other** and the way we **treat our environment** are raised in accessible ways for young teenagers.

Alongside these themes, the book introduces readers to basic evolutionary adaptation and raises a number of moral issues and difficult decisions for students to ponder and discuss.

Writing style

Using straight-forward vocabulary and a simple third person narrative, this book is accessible for less accomplished readers, yet with sufficient depth of ideas to engage more advanced readers. This book succeeds in providing an engaging story for less motivated readers, without condescending to them with overly simplistic ideas.



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Year level suitability and application

The simplicity of the narrative would suggest an audience of Year 8 or Year 9 students, although it could also work well with Year 10 reluctant readers, given the depth of the ideas.

Learning opportunities

BEFORE READING:

Prior knowledge discussion / activities:

There is great potential for cross curricular activities here, particularly with science.

- Learn about the Irish Croppers and/or convict transportations to Australia in the 18th century
- Learn about the effects of Vitamin D deficiency and inbreeding
- Learn about evolutionary adaptation

DURING READING:

Understanding the content

Questions/tasks can be assigned chapter by chapter, or as one or more worksheets during or after reading. Many are relevant as individual written reflection OR as class/group discussion topics.

Chapters 1 - 2:

What decision would you have made when Mum broke her leg?

- Wait with mum and make sure she stays well
- Go looking for help

And once you had got lost?

- Stay put and create a visible display
- Keep trying to find the way back to Mum
- Explain your decisions and provide justification for this being the best action to take.

Chapters 3 – 4

1. Find out the best way to catch an eel. Write a report on this.
2. Imagine they caught the eel and write a recipe for cooking it.

3. Write a descriptive passage about being attacked by an eel.

4. List all the reasons someone might be afraid of light.

Chapter 5:

In this chapter we hear about a number of reasons why the Night Tribe stay in hiding. List those reasons

Chapter 6:

Navigator challenges our concepts of time. Summarise his view of time and why clocks are not natural or helpful.

Chapter 7:

1. Write Toby or Millie's diary after their failed attempt to get out via the waterfall.
2. "It's usually a him" (pg 70) What does Millie mean by that statement?
3. Write a paragraph about who you think Niho is and why Bartholomew and Eli were hiding from him.

Chapter 8

Have a discussion about Empty's belief that the Night Tribe will save humankind by surviving after the rest of us have destroyed the world. What is your response to that?

Chapter 9

1. The children help Librarian to sort magazines into what is Knowledge and what is not. If you had to catalogue information in this way, what would you include as knowledge, and what would you reject? Why?
2. Why do you think the elders refuse to let Historian build a steam engine?

Chapters 10 - 11

In these chapters Millie does three things that she wouldn't have believed possible. Describe a time when you have had to do something you didn't believe was possible for you and what you learnt from it.

Chapter 12

1. Define the difference between Natural Rights and Legal Rights.
2. What prejudices is Natural Law used to justify?

Chapter 13

All the Night Tribe characters are named after a role or a physical characteristic. What do we come to understand about the significance of this naming through Empty's desire to be Poet?

Chapters 14 – 15

Draw some of the key features of the trip to Bird's Nest, or of the Nest itself.

Chapters 16 – 18

List the reasons that cause Neck to change his mind about going with the children. How much truth do you think there is to them?

Chapter 19

What are the reasons for and against telling people about the Night Tribe?

Chapter 20

Write a conversation between Toby or Millie and a counsellor, as they try to describe the Night Tribe.

Write a letter from either Librarian or Neck back to Toby and Millie.

Would you have been able to forgive the Night Tribe for what they did?

POST READING: TAKING IT FURTHER

Themes/Discussion points:

- The Night Tribe genuinely believe they are rescuing Toby and Millie, while Toby compares their imprisonment to that which the Originals fled in Australia. In small groups, debate these two perspectives on freedom.
- Despite snippets of information from magazines, most of the scientific knowledge in this community is 200 years old. Create a poster showing the positives and negatives of scientific and technological progress in that time.
- Describe the way the Night Tribe community is organised. They believe themselves to be egalitarian, but this is challenged several times by the children.
 - What real life examples can you find for societies that set out to treat everyone the same, but end up developing hierarchies and prejudices nonetheless.
 - What can we learn about human nature from this?
- Much of the medical knowledge of the doctor is out of date and useless, but there are a number of aspects of both healthcare and sustainability learnt from Māori that we could learn from. Create a presentation showing these things.
- Why does nobody except Ranger John believe the children? What does that tell us about how most people see the world?
- This book presents us with challenging ideas around freedom, equality, sustainability and conservation. In groups, choose one of these concepts and create a presentation showing the new ideas and challenges raised by the book.

— Susy Carryer