



# Mrs Battleship

## by Tim Tipene

### About the Author:

Tim was first published in 1996. He is the author of ten books, five of which have won awards, including the picture books for children: *Maui – Sun Catcher*, *Hinemoa te toa*, *Taming the Taniwha*, *Haere* and *The Wooden Fish*. Tim's other books include *Rewa finds his Wings*, and the novels, *Kura Toa Warrior School* and *Patu*.

### Introduction:

This book brings a unique local voice to our children in tackling some serious and relevant issues that impact on many of our children's lives. Through reading, we are able to find our own experiences as well as develop a greater understanding and respect for the experiences of others. As stated in *The Literacy Learning Progressions: Meeting the Reading and Writing Demands of the Curriculum* (MoE, 2010, page 7) "Literacy is a sociocultural practice. Students bring their lived experiences –their culture, language, and identity –with them into the classroom."

I think the biggest message from Tim's book is that for him writing has always been a creative outlet. It was a means to communicate that was safe and didn't get him into trouble. It allowed him to create some structure around himself; his thoughts, feeling and reactions, in the midst of an otherwise chaotic and unpredictable world. And most importantly it was his means of escape, in which he could use his imagination to create any kind of world or experience he wanted. Tim didn't have an understanding of spelling conventions, punctuation, grammar or genre. But he did understand the purpose and the joy of writing.

*"Writing is one of the ways in which we explore our meaning of our world. It enables us to discover, clarify, and share personal interpretations of events and ideas... Children's learning should be of the kind in which predominantly they make their own decisions about what to say and how to go about saying it. They will then see the value of their writing in learning and communicating about their world."* (Dancing with the Pen: The Learner as a Writer. MoE 1992, page 11).

### Year level suitability and Curriculum links

- Years 3-8 (7+ years of age)
- New Zealand Curriculum English & Social Sciences Levels One to Four. This book particularly lends itself to *Writing: developing and conveying student voice*.

- New Zealand Curriculum Key Competencies: Thinking; Using language, symbols, and texts; Managing self; Relating to others; and Participating and Contributing.

## Themes / Issues

Tim uses humour and universal experiences of friendship, belonging, adventure and hope to support the reader through difficult themes of bullying, violence, neglect, failure and fear. He allows the reader to choose what to focus on and how to feel about it. In a similar way, when setting activities in the classroom following the reading of this book, we need to be mindful of allowing students to make choices about what they write about and how they express their experiences. Some may be happy to use 'recount' to directly tell their stories, while others may find using a narrative and speaking through a fictional character a better option. Some may choose to explore the deeper themes, while others will feel more comfortable keeping it lighter and more humorous. As teachers, we can support our students to find their own voice.

## Learning opportunities

### Before reading: Setting the scene

Working in pairs, groups or whole class look at the cover and predict what the book may be about. Direct students to the key information: Where are the stories set? When? Who is Tim? What is a hero? What do the words surrounding Tim tell us? Who might Mrs Battleship be? How is Tim feeling?

As the students begin making connections to their prior knowledge and experiences, the teacher can begin assessing the students' level of understanding of some of the themes of the book: What does humorous mean? What does horrifying mean and possibly refer to? What do they know about bullying? Who can be a bully? In addition the teacher can note any students who appear uncomfortable, either by withdrawing or becoming agitated, and who may find these themes challenging.

### Extension activities

- What do you think Tim thinks about the cover of his book? Why?
- What would the cover of a book about your teacher look like?
- What would you want the cover of a book about you to look like?
- Key idea and writing topic suggestions relating to each chapter

### WHO AM I?

- What makes me unique?
- Brainstorm ideas for your own WHO AM I? eg pepeha, family, friends, physical descriptors, interests, pets, favourite places.
- How well do you know your classmates? Write a WHO AM I? about someone else. Can the class guess who it is?

## BUTTERFLY TAPE

Who keeps me safe?

- Think of a time that you were hurt or injured. Who helped you?
- Think of a time that you helped someone else when they got hurt. How did you feel?

## SCHOOL

- Why do I go to school?
- What is the best thing and the worst thing about school?
- If you could change one thing about school, what would it be?

## MRS LEONARD

- What is a teacher's job?
- Create the perfect teacher.
- If you were the teacher, what kind of teacher would you be?

## PLUMS FOR MISS

- How do I show people that I care about them?
- Think about a time that you did something nice for someone else. How do you think they felt?
- Think about a time someone did something nice for you. How did you feel?

## A SHORT STORY

- What am I good at?
- Think of a time that you felt really proud of something you had done.
- Write about something you would really like to do one day.

## THE BATTLESHIP

- What is the difference between joking around to be funny and hurting someone's feelings?
- Write about a time that you said something and then wished you hadn't said it.
- Write about what happened once Tim and his brother got home.

## MRS BATTERSBY

- Who do I trust?
- Who would you like to have by your side when things get tough.
- Why do you think the children called Mrs Battersby "The Battleship"?

## MRS BATTERSBY RETIRES

- How do I know when someone cares about me?
- Describe what it was like when Mrs Battersby met Tim again when he was all grown up.
- Think about a time when someone did something nice for you. How did it feel?

## DAD

- What is it like being around an angry person?
- Have you ever been so angry you cried? Write about it.
- Is it okay to be angry? Explain why you think that.

## MUM

- What am I responsible for?
- Write a story about an animal you know.
- If you could choose the best pet ever, what would it be and why?

## I CHOSE A GOOD LIFE

- What makes me scared?
- Write a story about being scared.
- Write a story about the best Christmas ever.

## RESPECT

- What do I need?
- Write a story about what makes you feel happy at home.
- Create some Rules for Parents.

## CHOICE

- Who do I want to be?
- Imagine you are grown up -write a story about your job.
- Imagine you are a parent -write a story about your children.

## After reading

- What would you say to Tim? Write a letter and tell him.
- What would you say to Mrs Battersby? Write a letter and tell her.
- Is there a teacher who has been special for you? Write a letter and tell them.
- Imagine you are grown up. Write a letter to yourself.

by Catherine Hannken