**Big Question:**

*“What would Aotearoa be like if all New Zealanders embraced the concept of being a multi-cultural country underpinned by bicultural foundations?”*

In many ways Witi Ihimaera’s poem could be viewed as an extension of this question, inviting readers to consider not only what Aotearoa might have been and what it could become, but also the role they might play in this unfolding story.

The integration of te reo Māori within the body of the poem is an important element of this vision.

**Pre-reading activity**

In this learning activity, consider what makes Aotearoa unique. In the left-hand side of the chart, write down what was special or unique about Aotearoa prior to the arrival of the Europeans. In the middle column of the chart, what you think is special or unique about Aotearoa today. You will fill in the third column after analysing the poem.

You must consider to consider:

· the natural environment

· the ways people relate(d) with the land

· the ways societies are/were organised

· collective stories

· language

· significant people or groups.

| **Aotearoa pre-European settlement** | **Aotearoa today** | **Aotearoa in the future** |
| --- | --- | --- |
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**OUR WATCH NOW BY WITI IHIMAERA**

[Witi Ihimaera reads his poem 'Our Watch Now'](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pU2J0EFihGI)

If New Zealand had been Aotearoa

just imagine …

The Treaty would have been honoured in 1840

Māori would have retained their tino rangatiratanga

and Pākehā would have kāwanatanga

Being kaitiaki,

we would have heard huia still singing today

our seas would flourish with the thunder of sounding whales

Matariki would usher in Aotearoa New Year

This is not to say we wouldn’t have had wars between us

and through the years, that there wouldn’t have been pain and lots

of anger and tears

But … just imagine …

… what might have been … what we could have seen … and

what it might mean …

The Representatives we send to the United Nations

would be … from Aotearoa …

The Prime Minister would have a tā moko …

and might even be a wahine ariki …

Being kaitiaki,

the huia would fill the air with

coruscating beauty and incandescent trilling

pods of tohorā would thrill our blood

with regular soundings along our shores

and tales all children would have learnt

would be about whale riders, mountain movers,

and mythical taniwha

Māori Earth … not

Middle Earth

It’s our watch now

the time to make dreams come true

today is a good day to begin …

Kia hora te marino

kia whakapapa pounamu to moana

kia tere te kārohirohi mua i tōu huarahi

Āianei, ā ake tonu atu

May the calm be widespread

no storms, but a glistening greenstone sea instead

and may the shimmer of rainbow lit spray

ever dance over our pathway.

**Discussing the text - kōrero**

Work in pairs.

1. Read the title of the poem. What do you think it means? What do you think the poem will be about?
2. Begin to read the poem. As you read the poem, interact with it. This can include:
   * writing down questions as they come into your mind
   * highlighting any patterns you notice in the poem, for example, the use of repetition
   * writing down any connections you make with the poem. These connections can be connections with yourself, your world, something you have read, or other parts of the poem.
3. Identify the structure of the poem. How are different sections indicated? Why do you think the poem ends with a blessing?
4. Define the key terms in the table below. Use clues in the poem to help you or have a guess. You may like to add other words in the poem that are unfamiliar to you. Once you have come up with a definition for each word, compare your definitions with those of other classmates or with a dictionary. Note that a Māori dictionary is available online: <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/>

| Term | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| tino rangatiratanga |  |
| kāwanatanga |  |
| kaitiaki |  |
| flourish |  |
| coruscating |  |
| Matariki |  |
| incandescent |  |
| tā moko |  |
| wahine ariki |  |

1. Clarify your understanding of the poem by summing up its main ideas in your own words.

**Post-reading questions**

1. After analysing the poem, has your understanding of the title of the poem changed? If so, how?
2. Why do you think Witi Ihimaera refers to huia and tohorā (whales) in his poem? Why are these creatures significant in terms of the history of Aotearoa?
3. What emotions does the poem inspire? How?
4. What do you think it would be like to live in the imagined world Witi Ihimaera presents?
5. How do you think people from other countries would perceive Aotearoa if it was as imagined in the poem?
6. Discuss your vision for the future with one of your classmates. In what ways is it similar or different to the vision evident in Our Watch Now? In what ways does your vision reflect biculturalism and/or multiculturalism? What part can you play in making your vision a reality?