



## Pounamu Pounamu

*Witi Ihimaera*

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## **Pounamu Pounamu Witi Ihimaera**

Pounamu Pounamu is classic Ihimaera. First published in 1972, it was immediately endorsed by Maori and Pakeha alike for its original stories that showed how important Maori identity is for all New Zealanders. As Katherine Mansfield did in her first collection *In a German Pension* (1911), and Janet Frame in *The Lagoon* (1951), Witi Ihimaera explores in *Pounamu Pounamu* what it is like to be a New Zealander - but from a Maori perspective. The seeds of Ihimaera's later works are first introduced in this ground-breaking collection- *The Whale Rider* in his story 'The Whale', *The Rope of Man* in 'Tangi', and the character of Simeon from *Bulibasha*, *King of the Gypsies* in 'One Summer Morning'; and the themes of aroha (love), whanaungatanga (kinship) and manaakitanga (supporting each other), which are so integral to Ihimaera's work.

## **Pounamu Pounamu Details**

Date : Published 1972 by Reed New Zealand

ISBN : 9780868636757

Author : Witi Ihimaera

Format : Paperback

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Adult

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# From Reader Review Pounamu Pounamu for online ebook

## Rachel Adams says

This book is a compilation of short stories based around a Maori boy and his family, written by Witi Ihimaera.

I decided to read this book because I wanted to read another book based around New Zealand as I enjoyed the last one I read, also I thought it would be more interesting to read a book of smaller stories rather than a long novel.

The category that this novel completes is "three poems or short stories from one anthology."

I liked this category because it gave me the opportunity to take a break from reading lengthy novels and read a book which had smaller stories in it. I thought it was an interesting category because there were quite a few books to choose from and it was not too restricting on what I could read.

My favourite quote from the book was at the end of the last short story that I read, when the main character was talking about the fire that burnt down his grandparents home, he said "There are some things that a fire can never destroy. And I saw not fingers of flame but a soft luminous glow reaching out and around me." I loved this quote because it showed the positive view that this boy manages to have on such a traumatic event. He saw the memories and happy times that were treasured during the time in the home, not the times of devastation when all was lost.

Something I learnt from this book was to treasure what you have even after it is gone. The boy in these stories lost his grandmother and then his grandparents house was burnt down, but he still thinks about the happy times and memories that he had with his grandmother. I think that the fact that he held onto the memories that made him happy is very important because it shows how strong he proved that it is still possible to have a positive outlook on life even though it seemed that he had lost everything.

A setting that was interesting to me in this book was their hometown of Waituhi. I found this setting interesting because it is such a special place to all of the characters in the book, not only because it is where they all grew up, but it's where their ancestors fought to get their land back during the Treaty of Waitangi times. I think that this is interesting, because the family had stayed together and stayed in the same spot because it had such great value to them and I think this shows huge pride and dedication to your family and background.

I liked this book because it taught me valuable lessons and it taught me a bit about Maori culture. I give it 4 out of 5 stars.

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## Joey Diamond says

These are perfect stories.

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## Glenda says

First collection of short stories by a Maori author. I really liked the embedding of Maori terms without defining them. !let were readily understood by context of repetition.

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## Rusalka says

This was the perfect time to read this book in this challenge. It turns out I was almost experiencing an element of Aussie literary homesickness. As much as I have loved some of the places I have been taken, and the stories I have been told, I longed for a familiar voice.

This book sated me while still opening my eyes to new experiences. Let me explain.

First and foremost, I love Kiwis and New Zealand. I find New Zealanders (or Kiwis to us Aussies) to be some of the most lovely people on the planet. They seem to have most of the qualities I love about Australians but with a slightly gentler spirit. Maybe that's what happens when you have nothing poisonous on your islands and all you native creatures are birds. But it was an eerily familiar voice in a different culture. And it helps when you read all the vowels the wrong way round so it sounds like a Kiwi accent. And I understood most of the English slang (not the Maori to begin with, but more on that later). It was home after being away so long. And that's leaving out the fact that New Zealand is one of the most beautiful parts of the world, which I was lucky enough to rely on my imagination for (although I have only been to the wrong island for this book).

My Mum picked up this book last time she was in NZ, and when I said I was doing this challenge and asked her and her husband for suggestions, they both recommended this book. I said "But Kiwi books would be the same as Aussie books though. I'm looking for something different". They assured me I was wrong and to read it. And I will admit they were right.

The short stories are written about traditional-ish Maori communities in the North Island of NZ around the 1960s. The kids are feeling the pull of Western culture and to the cities, where as the adults are concerned about the continuation of their communities and the cultural and religious traditions that are so completely intertwined to the communities. I find Maori culture fascinating (and I admit I have quite a few tikis in my ownership) and therefore wanted to know more about what was important and sacred to these communities. And Ihimaera does this in a way that is accessible for us. He also mingles Maori into the text, so before long you have picked up words in Maori and they no longer need to be explained.

It's brilliant writing. I'm not a huge fan of short stories, I get frustrated as I either don't find out enough so I don't engage with the story, or I engage and then feel cheated. But this didn't happen too often in this book. The stories are heartbreaking and so, so funny. One story about the Maori Hockey Tournament had me laughing so hard, even when I was rather sick. These warrior peoples, with the gentleness and politeness of not only their own culture but the general New Zealand-ness, competing with each other and their own little problems, was so hysterically well balanced and told it was a marvel.

I highly recommend it. I understand not everyone will be able to jump in with both feet like I was without the knowledge of us down in the Antipodes as well as the Kiwi's own interesting version of slang (which I will admit we mock them for. Jandles? Really?), but it is a wonderful introduction to one of my favourite

places on earth, Maori culture and the problems that have faced Indigenous cultures all around the world, especially by those who have been invaded/colonised (choose your own term) by White Europeans.

For more reviews visit <http://rusalkii.blogspot.com.au/>

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## Frances Belt says

‘Pounamu Pounamu’ Response by Frances B :)

1)

For a recent Social Studies assignment, I had to write about two famous New Zealanders. Having read ‘Whale Rider’ and really enjoyed it, I decided to write about Witi Ihimaera. Ihimaera is the first Maori writer to publish both a novel and a collection of short stories (first in 1973,) , so his work is very important to New Zealand culture and heritage. I wanted to quote a sentence or two from ‘Whale Rider’, as an example of his writing style, and was certain I owned a copy. I searched the entire house for it, but could not find one anywhere. However, I did find a slightly battered copy of ‘Pounamu Pounamu’. Originally, I read the book to find a suitable quote, but I loved the collection of short stories so much I read it again. Twice.

2)

‘This boy will also become ‘one of the crowd’. It will be a great relief because it will mean he is socially acceptable. Like the crowd, he will shuffle around with his hands in his pockets. He once used to run, but from now on everything will be done slowly: that way, it looks sexy. He already wears his cap at a rakish angle, and his school socks around his ankles. When addressed, he grunts. Maybe he smiles, but only for a while, because it might crack the carefully cultivated sneer on his face. But would he ever talk with a girl? Never!’ -- ‘One Summer Morning’, page 94.

This is a quote from the short story that I found the most enjoyable, because of the way that Ihimaera pokes fun at the behaviour of young teenage boys. I can relate to this quote very easily (as well as the entire short story,) and found it interesting and hilarious, as it gave me a sort of birds-eye-view on how people my age behave, and how weird and ridiculous it looks. Supposedly anybody who was a teenager could recount such experiences, but Ihimaera brings them to life in the most convincing and amusing way, simply by showing them for what they are; not grossly over exaggerating or undermining any of this meticulous social hierarchy.

3)

I have not read very many books made up of a collection of short stories, so this was a new experience for me. ‘Pounamu Pounamu’ provides a range of entertainment for the reader, as Ihimaera balances and interweaves humour and poignancy into each short story. I found this turned ‘Pounamu Pounamu’ into ten books in one, which seems like too many different plots and characters for one book. However, Ihimaera ties each short story together with Maori values and culture, and the importance of love. Love always plays a prominent part in ‘Pounamu Pounamu’, from romance on the hockey field (quite literally a field,) to a young man approaching his father’s grave. I really liked this, and the diversity Ihimaera gave to love, enhancing and reducing its influence and power in each story.

Some stories, however, did seem to be of inadequate length (though there were definitely more short stories I liked than disliked). In some cases, I grew bored of the narrative, feeling that some of the themes were too strong or saddening for my liking. ‘The Whale’ would be a good example of this, although I understand the

message the author is trying to convey, I found the imagery (particularly in the final paragraph,) almost too desolate and dramatic. Not that I mind that, but it wasn't what I was looking for when I read 'Pounamu Pounamu'.

5)

'Pounamu Pounamu' encompasses a great number of different emotions, from happiness to anguish, sadness to reflection. These feelings are at the heart of every short story; are the main themes of each narrative. They support the plot as well as help to define the message. In 'The Other Side of the Fence', the reader must weigh up the opinions of two neighbouring families: the Simmonses and the Heremaia. The story is told through the eyes of Jack Simmons (the father of the Simmons family,) and the narrative is often punctuated by his thoughts. We learn that Jack Simmons has mixed feelings towards the Heremaia (the six Heremaia children in particular,) and blames them for many smashed windows, missing bicycles and stolen goldfish. However, the Heremaia children are not always the tyrants Mr Simmons believes them to be, as he remembers the kindness the family showed to his when they first moved from England. 'The Other Side of the Fence' made me think about colonialism (the Simmonses being English and the Heremaia being Maori,) and how other people from foreign countries come to New Zealand can treat indigenous people as inferiors. This topic of colonialism seems slightly dated, however its legacy still needs to be addressed and thought about. 'Pounamu Pounamu' is about appreciating the love and values of Maori culture, and Ihimaera's hope that it will not vanish is expressed through touching and poignant short stories that the reader can relate to, empathise with or simply enjoy.

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### **Wendy Jackson says**

A book of short stories: I enjoyed some more than others. More than the detail of the stories, it is the feeling that seems to be sticking - the sadness of elders over loss of Māori culture through urbanisation, which must have been severe when the book was published in the early 1970s. [As a counter to the sad feeling brought on by the book, today I read that a new strategy for Māori language revitalisation is being released to the New Zealand public for consultation.] Anyway, reading this book made me realise that I do not read nearly enough Māori authors, and this definitely has to improve.

Note: If you have not yet seen the movie "The Whale Rider" - based on one of Ihimaera's books - it is a definite recommend (five stars, easily).

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### **Robyn Glover says**

I don't know if it was the homesickness for New Zealand playing with my heart strings, but I could barely

get through the last story's eloquently written emotion. So much heartbreak and love in 5 small pages. Gorgeous.

I love reading Witi's stories and novels and hope to continue building my collection. Pounamu Pounamu was not the first book by him I've read and certainly won't be the last.

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### **Bella says**

"Pounamu Pounamu" is a collection of short stories written by one of New Zealand's most iconic authors that I personally found very relatable. I chose to read "A Game of Cards", "Fire on Greenstone" and "In Search of the Emerald City" because I am a fan of Ihimaera's writing and find his topics and messages very thought provoking. Further more I wanted to read a book by a New Zealand author and written by someone of Pacifica or Maori descent.

Reading "Pounamu Pounamu" covers the short stories box on the reading hopscotch. I really enjoyed the short stories because I was totally engaged throughout the entirety of the texts as they were short and to the point hence the name!

My favorite character who is unnamed features in two of the three stories, "A Game of Cards" and "Fire on Greenstone". He is a grand child who has left his home town of Waituhi to study at Victoria university and throughout both stories deals with family and cultural adversity. This is my favorite character because I can personally relate to the family and cultural problems he has being a young person in New Zealand today.

"And I saw not fingers of flame but a soft luminous glow reaching out around me."

I chose this quote from "Fire on Greenstone" because it took me while to figure out what Ihimaera meant. I think he means that some times the worst situations bring out and remind us of the best things; a silver lining perhaps. Which reinforces the idea that when something bad happens there is always some form of good that can come from it.

All of Ihimaera's writing has a strong bond and connection to family, culture and tradition which is what I took away from these three short stories. It really reminded me of the the influential impact family have on peoples lives and also the responsibilities we have within our families. A quote that I can identify with Ihimaera's but also other New Zealand writers such as Patricia Grace is blood is thicker than water due to their strong family ties weaved through their writing.

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### **Gabrielle says**

I read this first when I was young - maybe 13 - and impressionable. I remember actually crying during one of the stories.

Now I have perspective.

It's not that good.

And it's not the author's fault but this kind of 60s mysticism really grinds my gears. Because it becomes The Dominant Narrative about Māori, denying diversity. I have lots of other thoughts but I already a little bit hate myself for writing that last sentence.

Witi used to sometimes catch the same bus as me though so, you know, I still have a soft spot for him.

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### **Simon says**

A nice little collection of short stories that offers an authentic insight into Maori culture. I think every New Zealander should read some of Witi Ihimaera's work. I'm looking forward to picking up one of his novels, *The Matriarch* now, which is on my shelf.

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### **Jenny Keeton says**

Read this book years ago and reread some of the stories often. "A Game of Cards" is still my favourite story to read aloud to a class of students; it's wonderful. Funny, sad, and evocative of a New Zealand way of life that still exists in many aspects of Maori society. Maori women in particular have this way of relating to each other and if you happen to get lucky and participate in an event on a Marae or just anywhere really where local kaumatua and rangatahi come together to host things, there is always this same sense of being part of their whanau. You are embraced and set to work alongside everyone else, laughing and joking as you peel the spuds and whip the cream and later crack open a beer or wine and sit around singing or talking to your new mates.

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### **Gaye Marshall says**

This is a collection of short stories set in New Zealand of the 1970's. The stories will take you from laughter to tears in a matter of minutes. The characters are very real - Witi Ihimaera could have been writing about people in my home town, they are so accurate. The events, the language, the rituals people follow and how different cultures live side by side, if not harmoniously, then certainly with hilarity are shown in these stories.

What is clever is how even in a short story, you can know these characters and when tragedy hits, you feel pain at their loss. But it's not all doom and gloom; the hockey match is so funny along with the romance going on during and after the match.

This is a no frills but gritty rendering of mixed Maori and pakeha (european or 'white' New Zealanders) society and the meshing of these two cultures.

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## Nick says

“This old one, he sighs, and the sound fills the darkness. He looks upon the carved panels, the tukutuku reed work, the swirling red and black and white kowhaiwhai designs, and he remembers he awoke to life here. That was long ago, another world ago, when this meeting house and whanau, this village, brimmed over with happiness and aroha. Always he has lived here. This meeting house has been his heart, his strength. He has never wished to leave it. In this place lie his family and memories. Some are happy, others are sad. Some are like dreams, so beautiful that they seem never to have existed. But his dreams died long ago. With each tangi, each funeral, they have died. And he is the last of the dreamers.” (“The Whale”, p. 157-158)

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## zespri says

Written in 1972, this is Witi Ihimaera's first book, a collection of short stories. These lovely stories deal with rural Maori life, and give a window into that world. Being a Pakeha New Zealander, these stories are invaluable, as open up a cultural world that exists alongside mine.

I loved Witi's use of words and phrases to convey his subjects, and came away from the collection challenged and heartened, aroha being a common theme.

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## Alison says

I read this book alongside Katherine Mansfield's *New Zealand Stories*, one story from each anthology a day for 10 days while on holiday in New Zealand. It wasn't so much a deliberate choice, as these were just two authors I liked who had anthologies of stories set in NZ, but it became impossible not to read them in dialogue a little. Partly because the structures and style are so similar. Both focus on specificity to build worlds that explain a society to an unfamiliar audience. Mansfield uses this to evoke a still-pretty-colonial New Zealand, a world transitioning from wannabe-English to something-else. Ihimaera, however, uses this to throw a joyous window on a society which is right next to those who don't see it - literally next door in one of the stories. In using the techniques and style of writers like Mansfield, he is pushing New Zealand literature to represent Aotearoa too, his stories were written for those who have never saw their world in print, and for those whose worldview wasn't broad enough to see.

They are tremendous fun. Previous to this, my exposure to Ihimaera's work has been book length. The emotionalism that tinges his work works brilliantly in this format, adding punch to the stories without becoming cloying. There is tragedy here, but it is never depressing or alienating. Instead, the stories welcome the reader in with humour, usually self-deprecating, and the passion of the narrator substitute moderates the intended message of lost knowledge. With this much pride, how could things fade forever?

Each morning, I found myself itching to read my installment, well over Mansfield, whose mannered stories I used to love. But this world - while not always as technically proficient - felt more real to me, more suffused with life, and definitely more relevant to the country I was visiting.

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