He Tohu: He Whakaputanga | The Declaration of Independence 1835

Introduction by Vincent O’Malley

He Whakaputanga | The Declaration of Independence 1835 is one of three books developed to accompany the He Tohu exhibition at the National Library. He Tohu features three iconic New Zealand documents:

- He Whakaputanga | The Declaration of Independence, 1835
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi, 1840
- The Women’s Suffrage Petition | Te Petihana Whakamana Pōti Wahine, 1893.

He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni/The Declaration of Independence of New Zealand was signed by fifty-two rangatira around the north from 1835 to 1839. The rangatira declared ‘the Independence of our country, which is hereby constituted and declared to be an Independent State, under the designation of The United Tribes of New Zealand’.

He Whakaputanga was a powerful assertion of mana and rangatiratanga at a time when Māori were negotiating increasingly complex relationships with European newcomers. It also signalled a shift toward unified forms of governance among many different rangatira, their hapū and iwi.

He Whakaputanga was a visionary document – remarkable in its time and no less pertinent today. It forms a significant part of the historical narrative that precedes the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840.

Vincent O’Malley has written widely about Māori history, including The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000 (BWB, 2016), The New Zealand Wars | Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa (BWB, 2019), and Voices from the New Zealand Wars | He Reo nō ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa (BWB, 2021) for which he won the 2022 Ockham award for general non-fiction. In 2022, he received the Prime Minister’s Award for Literary Achievement (non-fiction).

Key Features

- An introduction by Dr Vincent O’Malley, setting the historical context.
- Portraits of some signatories.
- A full-colour reproduction of He Whakaputanga, accompanied by a brief discussion of the document and its content.
- A map identifying the principal residences of He Whakaputanga signatories at the time of signing.
- Short biographies of the signatories and witnesses, many with extraordinary and fascinating detail.
- Texts of He Whakaputanga in both te reo Māori and English.
- The archival story of He Whakaputanga.
Relevant curriculum links

**Level 1 (from 2024)**
- **AS 92024** Engage with a variety of primary sources in an historical context
- **AS 92025** Demonstrate understanding of the significance of an historical context
- **AS 92027** Demonstrate understanding of perspectives on an historical context (This is an externally assessed task which, according to the instructions provided Pilot Schools in 2023, involves writing a report to a prescribed question in supervised conditions over a set assessment period, using prior learning (a taught context).)

**Level 2 (no change until 2026)**
- **AS91230 (2.2)** Examine an historical event, or place, of significance to New Zealanders
- **AS91232 (2.4)** Interpret different perspectives of people in an historical event that is of significance to New Zealanders
- **AS91233 (2.5)** Examine causes and consequences of a significant historical event
- **AS91224 (2.6)** Examine how a significant historical event affected New Zealand society

**Level 3 (no change until 2027)**
- **AS91434 (3.1)** Research an historical event or place of significance to New Zealanders, using primary and secondary sources
- **AS91436 (3.3)** Analyse evidence relating to an historical event of significance to New Zealanders
- **AS91437 (3.4)** Analyse different perspectives of a contested event of significance to New Zealanders
- **AS91438 (3.5)** Analyse the causes and consequences of a significant historical event

**Use in your history programme**

*He Whakaputanga / The Declaration of Independence 1835* can be used:
- as a source of primary and secondary material for inquiry into *He Whakaputanga/The Declaration of Independence* and/or *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*
- to learn about the context in which the Treaty was later to be signed
- to examine the concept of a constitution and the kinds of documents and agreements it may entail
- to examine the differing perspectives of the signatories to *He Whakaputanga*
- to investigate cultural contact or race relations in New Zealand
- to explore how the physical history of a document might reflect changing perceptions of its meaning and significance.

Students might respond to *He Whakaputanga / The Declaration of Independence 1835* by:
- re-presenting the biographical information about a particular signatory or witness in visual and/or oral form and sharing this with the class to build collective knowledge
- reading the note on sources (page 23) and discussing the different kinds of sources the editors used to learn about the signatories
- using the references and sources (pages 66–70) and those suggested in the Further Reading section below to find out more about specific individuals and how their personal life stories interwove with those of their communities and New Zealand as a whole
- comparing and contrasting the perspectives of a signatory and a witness
• imagining themselves as the unidentified witness and writing home to describe what they have seen and their responses
• writing an essay that examines or analyses the reasons for signing He Whakaputanga
• viewing the He Tohu Kōrero videos to learn about what He Whakaputanga means for people today, and coming to their personal conclusions about its relevance to their lives.

Cross-curricular links

**English:** Read the English translation of He Whakaputanga as an example of a ‘declaration of independence’ and piece of formal writing. Study the choice of language and words.

Further reading and resources

**Print**

Most of the books suggested below have been part of previous BiSL distributions. You can find teacher notes for most of them at [http://bwb.co.nz/teacher-notes](http://bwb.co.nz/teacher-notes).


**Online**

**BWB Collections:** [http://bwb.co.nz/collections](http://bwb.co.nz/collections)
BWB’s Treaty of Waitangi Collection includes digital versions of most of the BWB texts listed above, and many more. These digital Collections are available to libraries through subscription access; for information, please contact collections@bwb.co.nz.


**He Tohu:** [https://natlib.govt.nz/he-tohu](https://natlib.govt.nz/he-tohu)

These include videos representing a range of contemporary perspectives.

**He Tohu – Learning activities:** [https://natlib.govt.nz/he-tohu/learning/learning-activities](https://natlib.govt.nz/he-tohu/learning/learning-activities)
Use these activities to inspire and inform students as they explore concepts related to He Whakaputanga.

**Topic Explorer – He Whakaputanga:** [https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/topics](https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/topics) – filter by:

He Tohu: He Whakaputanga, English
He Tohu: He Whakaputanga, te reo Māori


**Many Answers – Declaration of Independence (New Zealand):**
The BWB Publishing Trust: Books in School Libraries
Books in School Libraries sets out to enrich school library collections and enhance New Zealand students’ understanding of their country. The project allows supporters to sponsor titles from the Bridget Williams Books catalogue for donation to secondary school libraries.

The Freemasons Foundation and Raewyn Dalziel
We thank the Freemasons Foundation and Raewyn Dalziel for their generous support for *He Whakaputanga | The Declaration of Independence 1835* in the Books in School Libraries Programme.

---

**Teacher guidance**

Hītori Māori | Māori History: [http://maorihistory.tki.org.nz](http://maorihistory.tki.org.nz)

