

The 9th Floor

Conversations with Five New Zealand Prime Ministers

By Guyon Espiner and Tim Watkin

Notes for Contemporary

Based on the acclaimed RNZ podcast series, and including new material, *The 9th Floor* by journalists Guyon Espiner and Tim Watkin presents in-depth interviews with five former prime ministers of New Zealand. Geoffrey Palmer, Mike Moore, Jim Bolger, Jenny Shipley and Helen Clark reflect on their time occupying the prime ministerial offices on the ninth floor of the Beehive. Their recollections amount to a fascinating record of the decisions that shaped modern New Zealand.

KEY FEATURES

- An introduction that explains the purpose of the series and its development.
- Substantial interviews with five former New Zealand prime ministers, canvassing a wide range of issues and topics.
- An opening essay for each interview that sets the context and indicates themes and questions for consideration.
- Lightly edited transcripts of the interviews, interspersed with explanatory commentary.
- Insights into the personal stories of the former prime ministers.
- The opportunity to compare the presentation of information in different media: print, audio, and video.

THEMES

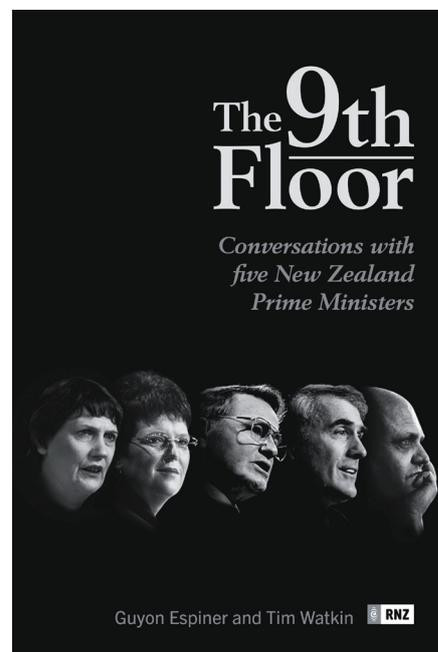
Citizenship, community, civics, contemporary New Zealand issues, economics, elections, ethical issues, government, international relations, leadership, media, migration, oral history, participation, politics, power, race relations, taking action, Treaty of Waitangi, welfare

CURRICULUM LINKS

Social studies, economics, history, English, media studies

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

This absorbing set of interviews provides a springboard for students to think critically about contemporary issues in New Zealand society. It has special value for teaching in the social sciences, with its core focus on citizenship. It would reward a cross-curricular approach, with students responding critically to the interviews in media of their choice.



ABOUT THE WRITERS

Guyon Espiner has worked in print, television and radio for more than twenty years, including fourteen years covering Parliament, mostly for Television New Zealand, where he was political editor. After two years with TV3 he switched to radio, becoming co-host of RNZ's *Morning Report*. Espiner continues to write political profiles for the *Listener* magazine.

Tim Watkin has worked in journalism for over two decades, including at the *New Zealand Herald*, as deputy editor for the *Listener*, and more recently as a producer for TVNZ's *Q+A* and TV3's *The Vote* and *The Nation*. He has written articles for the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*, blogs at Pundit.co.nz and is currently executive producer for podcasts and series at RNZ.

Books in School Libraries

- Select a key quote or idea for the students or ask them to select their own. Have the students discuss their immediate response to the quote, read further, and develop a more considered response to share with the group. The quote could be from one of the interviews or it could be from one of the introductory essays. For example, Tim Watkin's first paragraph is provocative, where he states that '[T]ime changes minds and alters perceptions. And in politics, as we well know, perception – if not quite everything – is vital' (page 7).
- Tim Watkin states that 'this wasn't biography, it was about the prime ministership and the choices and responsibilities that come with power.' Have the students explore and explain the distinction, read about the interview process, and engage with the text. *What did Watkin and Espiner try to achieve, and how successful were they are? What are the strengths and limitations of what Watkin calls a 'legacy interview'?*
- Have the students listen to excerpts from the podcasts, view the videos and read extracts from the book. *How does the form impact on your experience of this material? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?*
- Have the students investigate the perspectives of different prime ministers on a contentious issue (for example, how Labour left the economy at the 1990 election). Then have them role-play a debate in which they take the stance of one of the former prime ministers.
- Take a jigsaw approach, with groups of students engaging with one of the interviews and sharing what they learned with the class. Give purpose to the learning by having the students decide upon questions they hope the interviews will answer.

Shared questions could include: *What impact did this prime minister have on New Zealand society? How appropriate is the label the journalists gave this former prime minister? What does this interview tell you about the extent of power enjoyed by a prime minister of New Zealand?*

Students could decide on specific questions following a reading of the introductory essay. For example, a reading of the introduction to Geoffrey Palmer's interview might invite questions about whether or not it is better for a prime minister to want power.

- The students could analyse the questions the journalists asked, identifying those that are common to all the interviews and those that are different. Invite them to speculate about the reasons for these commonalities and differences. The students could then pull out the threads of how different interviewees responded to the same question, and conduct further research to explore the reasons for similarities and differences.
- Have the students critically analyse how one of the former prime ministers responded to the questions they were asked. *What is fact? What is opinion?* Have the students run a fact check and share what they learn with the class. *With this in mind, how do you interpret the answers this prime minister has provided? What questions are you left with? What else would you need to know to make a fair judgement about the veracity of this prime minister's memories? How does this compare with other people's perceptions of their actions while in office?*
- The book and related activities could prompt discussion about the extent to which the story of an individual can help illuminate the history of a particular place and groups of people.
- The students could use the book as a prompt for exploring the role of the news media in a democracy. They could conduct their own interviews with people who have held positions of authority in the community (for example, former councillors) and draw them together to create a history of their place, using this book as a model. This could become a multi-media resource, accessible to the wider community.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Print

Andrew Dean, *Ruth, Roger and Me: Debts and Legacies*, BWB Texts, 2015

Jane Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment: A World Model for Structural Adjustment?* Bridget Williams Books, 1997: 2015

Colin James, *New Territory: The Transformation of New Zealand, 1984–92*, Bridget Williams Books, 1992: 2015

Online

BWB Critical Issues Collection: <http://bwb.co.nz/collections>

BWB's Critical Issues Collection contains digital versions of the print resources listed above, as well as others that could be used to take a future focus on the issues raised in *The 9th Floor*. BWB digital Collections are available to libraries through subscription access; for information, please contact collections@bwb.co.nz.

Premiers and Prime Ministers: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/premiers-and-pms>

Radio New Zealand: 'The 9th Floor' (podcast and video)

www.radionz.co.nz/programmes/the-9th-floor

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 Grace Memorial Trust

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