Journey

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PATRICIA GRACE

Born to a Māori father and white mother, Patricia Grace identifies as Māori and is affiliated with the *iwi* (clans) of Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, and Te Āti Awa. Growing up, she spent some of her childhood in the suburban home that her father built outside of Wellington, New Zealand, and some of it on her father's ancestral land of Hongoeka. Although she was an avid reader as a child, she started writing fiction only after attending Wellington Teachers' College and becoming a full-time teacher at the age of 25. While teaching, she joined a writing club and began to publish her work, setting off her ground-breaking career. In 1975, she became the first female Māori writer to publish a collection of short stories. She then began writing prolifically while simultaneously raising seven children. As of 2021, Grace has written seven novels, seven short story collections, six children's books, an autobiography, and a biography. Her work often deals with topics surrounding Māori identity and New Zealand's history of colonialism. Some of her most famous works include *Tu*, written in 2004, which discusses the Māori Battalion that fought in Italy in World War II, and *Potiki*, written in 1986, which depicts a Māori community's struggle to defend its land against development. In 2008, she won the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature. She now lives on ancestral land near Hongoeka Bay.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Journey" is written within the context of Māori resistance to white New Zealanders' ongoing colonization of Māori land. Beginning in the early 1800s, Māori people, who had been living on the islands of Aotearoa (or New Zealand) for centuries, experienced a dramatic increase in the number of Europeans arriving on their land. Most of these Europeans did not stay on the island permanently, but instead traded goods with the Māori in order to extract resources, such as timber, seals, and whales, that they would then sell back in Europe. Māori people engaged in this trade for their own reasons, often looking to gain political power in the context of ongoing wars between different *iwi* (Māori clans). The political climate changed again in 1840, when a British land prospecting company called the New Zealand Company began encouraging thousands of European settlers to move permanently to the island. This started off a long period of widespread Māori land loss, in which Europeans often used violence to take Māori lands, through both direct warfare and coercive treaties and land deals. Some Māori cooperated willingly, while others resisted European encroachment, such as during the New Zealand Wars in the 1860s and 1870s, when certain Māori *iwi* fought against British troops over land. By the time the narrator of "Journey" was born, in the early 1900s, the Māori population had greatly declined, and many Māori had migrated into cities as a result of land loss and economic hardship. However, resistance to colonization continued and erupted in the Māori protest movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Today, Māori people still resist the kinds of oppression that the narrator experiences in "Journey," such as land theft, racism, and increased risk of incarceration, poverty, and homelessness.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Beginning her writing career in the late 1960s, Patricia Grace was one of the foundational authors of the Māori Renaissance. This ongoing literary, artistic, and political movement emerged in response to white New Zealanders' attempts to erase Māori identity and colonize Māori lands. Māori Renaissance writers often represent the everyday lives of regular Māori people in order to explore questions of Māori national identity and struggles against colonization. Writing at the same time period as Patricia Grace, Witi Ihimaera also shaped the beginning years of the Māori Renaissance: in 1972, his foundational book, *Pounamu, pounamu*, became the first published short story collection by a Māori author. Grace and Ihimaera together influenced a new generation of Māori writers, including Keri Hulme, whose 1983 novel *The Bone People* won international recognition for its exploration of racial identity, trauma, and healing, and Alan Duff, whose acclaimed 1990 novel *Once We Were Warriors* explores the lives of Māori gang members and their families. Many authors are still writing within the tradition of the Māori Renaissance today, inspired by Patricia Grace's groundbreaking literature.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Journey
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Modern, Māori Renaissance
- **Genre:** Fiction, Māori Literature
- **Setting:** An unnamed city in New Zealand
- **Climax:** The narrator kicks the city planner's desk.
- **Antagonist:** The City Planner
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Land Theft. The narrator's struggle in "Journey" to defend his

land against development mirrors a real-life legal battle that Patricia Grace fought to protect her own ancestral land in Hongoeka Bay. In 2014, Grace won a suit against the New Zealand government, which was attempting to force her to sell her land in order to construct a highway. Happily, the author's real-life experience of attempted land theft ends more successfully than the fictionalized land theft she depicts in "Journey."

Italics. When Patricia Grace was writing the novel *Potiki* in 1986, one year after the Māori language, te reo Māori, became an official language of New Zealand, she decided not to italicize words written in te reo Māori. This was both a stylistic choice, in that she wanted her characters to speak on the page as they would naturally, and a political choice, in that she did not want to falsely represent te reo Māori as a foreign language by italicizing it. For these reasons, no te reo Māori words are italicized in "Journey."

PLOT SUMMARY

The story's narrator, an unnamed 71-year-old Māori man, leaves home to go into the city to meet with officials about the future of the land his family has owned for generations. As he waits for a taxi to pick him up, he feels annoyed by his family's nagging: he thinks they treat him like an old man. Still, he is in a good mood, happy to be out on his own and expecting to have success in the city. Traveling to the train station in the taxi, he watches the town pass by, noticing which parts of the landscape have changed and which have stayed the same.

He enters the train station and boards the train, continuing to observe the view out the window. He notes how much development has occurred in the area since he was young: construction projects have radically changed the landscape, filling ocean with land in some areas, causing erosion, and turning farmland into housing developments. While he bitterly resents the ways that the Pakeha disrespect the land, he reminds himself that the development provides people with basic needs, such as housing, food, and transportation. When he gets off the train in the city, he remembers how, during an economic crisis in his youth, many starving people lived in the train station, but his family survived because they were able to **garden** on the family's land. Outside the station, he sees a spot where the city bulldozed a graveyard to build a highway, and the narrator reflects again on the disrespectful behavior of the Pakeha. He then walks confidently to his meeting.

After the meeting, the narrator waits in the station for his train home, reflecting on the conversation with the city planner. In the meeting, the narrator explained that he wanted to subdivide his family's lot so that each of his nieces and nephews could live on it, but the city planner responded condescendingly, telling him that the land was slated to become a parking lot in a future housing development. The narrator urged the official to reconsider, explaining that the family's relationship to the land goes back generations, so they could not simply sell it to the city. The meeting escalated into an argument, in which the planner revealed the underlying racial discrimination of the city's decision: having a Māori family living together on the land would decrease the land's value. At this, the narrator became very angry and kicked the planner's desk, damaging it, and the planner forced him to leave the office.

The narrator returns home to his family in defeat. Instead of telling them how the meeting went, he shouts at them, demanding that when he dies, they cremate him instead of burying him in the ground, as he is afraid the development project will unearth his **remains**. He then retires to his room alone and sits on the edge of his bed for a long time, looking at his hands.

CHARACTERS

The Narrator – The unnamed 71-year-old Māori narrator is the protagonist of "Journey." He is the oldest living member of his family, which consists of himself, his 11 nieces and nephews, and their families. On his trip into the city to meet with officials about his family's land, the narrator reflects on the ways development has changed so much about the area he has lived in since childhood: he does not like how Pakeha-led construction projects hurt the land and disrespect the ancestors, yet he also recognizes the necessity of houses. His thoughts reveal his intimate relationship with the land, as it has provided him with sustenance ever since he was a child helping out in the family's **garden**. The narrator's emotional arc throughout the story also demonstrates the pain of land loss and colonization. He displays self-confidence and pride on his way into the city, as he is confident his meeting will go well, and he resents his family for the way they fuss over his age. When he meets with the city planner, he keeps his pride, but loses his confidence, as he realizes the extent of the city's anti-Māori racism and its repercussions for his family's future on the land. The narrator's violence towards the city planner, when he kicks the man's desk, represents Māori resistance, as the narrator feels that he has kept his dignity intact as he leaves. But when he returns home to his family, it is clear that his inability to assure his family's collective survival on the land pains him greatly. He isolates himself in his room feeling powerless and ashamed: whereas his "old man" sustained the family by gardening on the land, now he can't even assure the safety of his own **bones** after his death.

The City Planner – The city planner is the story's main antagonist, representing the forces of colonization that the narrator faces. Going into the meeting, the city planner has the same agenda as many other New Zealand government officials before him: that is, he wants to gain control of Māori-owned

land. The power difference between the narrator and the city planner is clear in the beginning of the story, as the narrator, despite being elderly, must take an entire day to travel all the way into the city in inclement weather to meet the official in his office. Additionally, the city planner speaks in a bureaucratic tone that is very different from the narrator's conversational tone and immediately begins condescending to the narrator. He becomes increasingly rude throughout the conversation, suggesting that because the narrator will be dead, what happens to his land should not matter to him, and ultimately telling the narrator that having a Māori family living on the land will decrease land value. This personal prejudice against the narrator's Māori identity is reinforced by institutionalized racism, as the city's racist zoning laws prevent the family from subdividing their land. Furthermore, it is clear that the narrator does not know the city planner's name, or does not feel comfortable enough with him to use it, as the reader learns that the city planner is called Paul only when the narrator kicks his desk and is forced to leave. The city planner therefore represents the forces of colonization threatening the Māori population of New Zealand.

George – George is a younger relative of the narrator, who would often run away from his home when he was a child and stay for weeks at the narrator's house without speaking. He now lives in the city, and although the family misses him deeply, they do not visit with him often. The family believes that he is unemployed and belongs to a gang. On the train, the narrator looks forward to running into George in the railway station in the city, as George is often there. But when he does see George, they sit together without talking. George functions in the story as an embodiment of the family's pain and trauma, his silence resonating with the narrator's own pained silence at the end of the story. Yet George also serves as a symbol of resistance and refusal. He resisted containment even as a child, and as an adult, he still refuses to conform to white society's standards. This combination of pain and refusal again resonates with the narrator's character, as the narrator resists the city planner's racism by kicking his desk, but hurts his own foot in the process.

The Taxi Driver – The taxi driver is a friend of the family who regularly drives the narrator and his family members around town. He has a wife and children. He expresses care for the narrator by making friendly conversation with him, turning on the heater to keep him warm, and driving the narrator to his door instead of dropping him off at the bottom of the driveway. In turn, the narrator also shows neighborly care to the taxi driver, offering to give him some vegetables from his **garden**. This caring relationship shows how the narrator's family is integrated into their community, further emphasizing their connection to a specific place.

TERMS

Pakeha – In the Māori language of *te reo Māori*, *pakeha* means a white New Zealander, as opposed to a Māori person. It is sometimes used as a noun and sometimes as an adjective. In "Journey," **the narrator** uses the term often to describe white New Zealanders and their culture, as when he mentions the "pakeha *kehuas*," or white people's ghosts.

THEMES

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MODERNIZATION AND COLONIAL VIOLENCE

"Journey" follows the thoughts of a 71-year-old Māori man as he reckons with the modern development projects that white New Zealanders are bringing to the area where his family has lived for generations. The story occurs over the course of one day, as the narrator travels into the city to meet with planners about the future of the land his family owns. At the beginning of the trip, the narrator's observations suggest that modern development has brought economic improvement to the area. However, the narrator's memories of the landscape soon reveal that modernization is actually a continuation of white New Zealanders' historic violence towards Māori land and communities. His meeting with the city planners confirms this conclusion, as the officials make thinly veiled racist remarks and threaten him with violence, and he ultimately leaves powerless to change the city's plans to turn his land into a parking lot. "Journey" therefore argues that "colonization," meaning the theft and occupation of Indigenous lands, did not end when New Zealand stopped being a British colony. Rather, colonization continues into the modern day.

At the beginning of the narrator's trip into the city, the narrator's observations allude to the fact that modern development has brought economic improvement to the area. As the narrator is leaving in the taxi, he notes that the shops in his town are "doing all right these days, not like before." Here, the narrator remembers a time when the shops, and by extension the town's entire economy, were doing worse than they are in the present. The narrator speaks to just how much worse the economy was in the past when he enters the railroad station in the city and remembers that the station used to be crowded with starving people, who came there "to do their dying." In this memory, he is describing a time of economic

depression so intense that many people in the area starved to death. The fact that people can now afford to support the butcher and fruit shops in his town indicates that the area's economy has improved drastically from those "hard times." Modern development seems to have had a large role in causing this economic improvement. Throughout his train ride into the city, the narrator observes a landscape that is undergoing rapid change, as the train passes many new houses and ongoing construction projects. Although he disapproves of these changes because they alter the landscape, he reasons that they are meeting many people's basic needs for shelter, food, and transportation. He admits that "people [have] to have houses, [have] to eat, [have] to get from here to there."

However, other details of the story suggest that the narrator has good reason to distrust the modernizing changes that have occurred in his area. Namely, through modernization, white New Zealanders have continued the colonial violence they began when they first settled the island, destroying Māori land and attempting to erase Māori communities. When Europeans began colonizing New Zealand in the 1800s, they occupied Māori land, often using violence and coercion to build European settlements and extract resources. Although New Zealand is no longer a colony, the Māori narrator's experience of modernization demonstrates that this colonial violence is still ongoing in the modern day. For example, the train passes over a strip of land that used to be sea. Here, the narrator remembers harvesting *pipis*, a shellfish that is an important food source for the Māori people, before white New Zealanders filled this part of the harbor with land in order to make room for more cars. Long after the end of New Zealand's colonial period, white New Zealanders are continuing to expand their access to traditional Māori lands and waters, preventing Māori people from engaging in culturally important practices in that area. The violence of these modernizing projects is clear in the narrator's descriptions. As the train passes more construction projects, the narrator describes the construction machines "slicing the hills away." When it rains, "the cuts will bleed for miles and the valleys will drown in blood." With these violent verbs, the narrator implies that white New Zealanders continue to control the island through violence, just as they did historically.

The same colonial violence is on display during the narrator's meeting, when the city planners use anti-Māori racism and violent threats to prevent the narrator from defending his land against development. At the narrator's insistence that his family live on their land together, the city planner responds that "you people all living in the same area [...] immediately brings down the value of your land." Even though he is using the modern, respectful language of a bureaucrat, his racism towards Māori people is clear: he thinks of the Māori with the dehumanizing phrase, "you people." Furthermore, this position reveals the racism of the entire real estate system: the land's value will decrease because white New Zealanders do not want a visible Māori presence on the land. In this way, the city planner demonstrates that, despite white New Zealanders' attempts to appear respectful of the Māori, they are still attempting to erase Māori communities. Finally, after the narrator damages the official's desk out of frustration at this overt racism, all three of the officials in the office threaten him with violence, suggesting that he should be institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital. The narrator returns home in defeat, unable to prevent the city from taking his land. Just like their colonial forefathers, the city planners use the threat of violence to appropriate Māori land and break up Māori families.

"Journey" complicates the idea of modernization in New Zealand. While modernization may have brought economic improvement compared to the recent past, it also perpetuates a longer history of colonization. By showing how white New Zealanders continue to steal land from the Māori through modernizing projects, Patricia Grace suggests that colonial violence did not end in the 1800s. Rather, colonial land theft is an ongoing process that continues to define New Zealand's society in the present day.

LAND AND CULTURE

In "Journey," Patricia Grace depicts two very different cultural relationships to land. As the narrator travels into the city from the land where his family has lived for generations, he observes how white New Zealanders treat land: they see it as a resource to exploit for profit. By contrast, informed by his Māori traditions, the narrator sees land as a living entity that has the capacity to care and be cared for. These two cultural traditions clash when the narrator meets with city officials who plan to appropriate his land for a future development project. At the end of this meeting, it is clear that the narrator will not be able to prevent the city from taking the land away from his family. Even the government's proposal to compensate the narrator by giving him land of "equal value" speaks to this different ethos about land: to the government it is just a resource, while to the narrator there can be no land "equal" to his own land, because his family has built a relationship with that particular piece of land over generations. By depicting the narrator's deep anguish and alienation at the loss of his land, the story speaks to the psychological cost of land dispossession for the Māori people.

As the narrator rides the train into the city, he observes how white New Zealanders exploit land as a resource for profit. As the train passes over an area of land that used to be sea, the narrator remembers that white New Zealanders constructed this land by "[pushing] a hill down over it and [shooting] the railway line across to make more room for cars." The violence of the words "pushing" and "shooting" suggests the white New Zealanders' disrespect for the land, as they treat it as an object they can manipulate according to their desires. When the train

passes active construction projects, the narrator observes this exploitative relationship with land again. In order to expand development, and therefore bring profit to the area, the white New Zealanders "chop up everything [...] couldn't go round, only through. Couldn't give life, only death." In doing so, they hurt the land, causing it to erode and "bleed for miles." Again, the white New Zealanders treat the land as an object they can manipulate for profit, remaining oblivious to the "death" and "bleeding[]" their exploitation causes.

By contrast, the narrator, informed by his Māori traditions, sees land as a living entity that has the capacity to care and be cared for. In criticizing the white New Zealanders' relationship with the land, the narrator reveals the Māori philosophy, remarking, "couldn't talk to a hill or tree these people, couldn't give the trees or the hills a name and make them special and leave them." This observation implies that Māori tradition personifies the landscape: far from being an exploited object, the land's individual hills and trees are unique beings that can be talked to and named. This caring relationship "[gives] life" to the landscape. In return, the landscape sustains the narrator, his family, and their wider community. During the "hard times" of the narrator's childhood, the family's **garden** kept them from starving, as the land was so fertile it supplied "turnips as big as pumpkins, cabbages you could hardly carry, big tomatoes, lettuces, potatoes, everything." In contrast to the white New Zealanders, who try to make money off the land, the family often took their excess vegetables into town and gave them away. In giving the landscape life by caring for it, the land, in return, keeps the narrator and his wider community alive. In this way, the narrator interacts with land through a relationship of mutual care. He continues to interact with the land in the present day. When the narrator returns home in the taxi, the taxi driver comments that the narrator's garden is "neat as a pin," showing that the narrator still puts a lot of work into caring for his land. As a result, the land gives the narrator the same sense of abundance and empowerment as it did when he was a child: he is able to offer vegetables to the taxi driver. In this way, the story shows that the narrator continues to cultivate his family's caring relationship with their particular parcel of land.

When the narrator travels into the city to meet with the city planner about his land, these two very different cultural traditions clash, revealing the psychological cost of land dispossession for the Māori people. In their plan to turn the narrator's land into a parking lot and compensate the family with "equivalent land" or money, the city planners reveal that they see land only as a resource to be exploited for profit. Instead of recognizing the narrator's unique relationship with his land, they assume that that parcel of land can be easily exchanged for one of "equal value," or even simply substituted with money. In their view, land has no unique qualities—it is only a placeholder for wealth. The narrator sees his land in the exact opposite way, responding that "if it's your stamping ground and you have your ties there, then there's no land equal." To him, his family's relationship with their specific land can't be reproduced anywhere else or substituted with money, because it is a relationship of mutual care that has gone back generations. Ultimately, the narrator is unable to convince the city planners to let his family continue to live on the land. He returns home to tell his family not to bury him because "it is not safe in the ground," as he is afraid the city's proposed construction project will unearth his **bones**. Through this statement, the narrator expresses a deep sense of powerlessness, anguish, and loss: the land that has sustained him and his family for generations is no longer safe. In this way, the story reveals the psychological devastation that land loss can cause for the Māori people.

HEROISM AND SOCIETAL INEQUALITY

In "Journey," Patricia Grace plays with a common story-telling template: the hero's quest. In this narrative tradition, a protagonist, often male, leaves home on an adventure, acts decisively in a conflict, and returns home victorious and changed. In the beginning of the story, the narrator —an unnamed old man—seems to conform to the role of hero, going on an adventure into the city to have an important meeting with city officials. However, as the story progresses, important differences arise. Instead of following the protagonist's actions, "Journey" follows the narrator's *inaction*, describing the old man waiting in different spots along his route. Ultimately, when the narrator does act decisively in his climactic conflict with city officials, it results in his returning home in defeat, not victory, changed for the worse instead of the better. In this way, Grace pushes her readers to consider the hero myth in light of widespread societal inequality, asking which members of society have the power to become heroes, and which are denied such possibilities and are forced to wait on the sidelines of their own narratives.

The narrator seems to conform to the "hero" archetype in the beginning of his story. Instead of giving the narrator a name, the story introduces him only as "an old man going on a journey." This introduction calls upon the hero's quest storytelling format: the narrator fits into the role of hero, leaving home alone on an adventure. Like many heroes, the narrator is going on a quest, venturing into the unknown to confront a foe. He remarks that he is traveling "further afield" than he normally does, in order to "see those people about his land." Although it is clear that the narrator has traveled into the city many times before, this language reveals that he still regards the city as a place distant from his home, one that holds many challenges. But also like many heroes, the narrator is optimistic. Although his family members have written letters to the city or gone there in person, he is confident he will be able to succeed where they failed, thus securing his family's future on the land. In this way, the narrator fits into the role of hero, going into

battle alone, confident he will be victorious and protect his community from threat.

However, the story soon starts deviating from the hero myth. Where a traditional myth would follow the hero's actions, the story mostly tracks the narrator's inaction. The narrator's journey consists mostly of waiting: waiting for the taxi at home; waiting for the taxi to arrive at the station; waiting for the train to come; waiting in the train to arrive in the city. The narrator does not control any of these forms of transportation and instead is only a passive participant. Additionally, the storytelling occurs almost exclusively in these moments of waiting, as the narrator observes the landscape on the journey into the city and reflects back on his meeting as he waits to return home. Far from tracking the hero's actions, this story represents the narrator as a passive participant. The narrator thinks to himself that "probably the whole of life was like that, sitting in the dark, watching and waiting." This sentiment reveals that despite the narrator's initial optimism, he often feels disempowered in life, forced to wait instead of act. Such feelings do not fit so neatly into the "hero" role, whose archetype is based on empowerment and action.

When the narrator returns home unable to prevent the city from taking his land, it is clear that societal inequality is the source of this disempowerment, deviating further from the "hero's quest" template. The narrator and his family face discrimination because they are Māori. For years, his family have been waiting for the city to give them permission to subdivide the land they have lived on for generations, so that all 11 of the narrator's nieces and nephews can build houses on it. In his meeting with the city official, the narrator learns that the city has not given this permission in part because a Māori family "all living in the same area [...] immediately brings down the value of your land." This racial discrimination reveals that Māori people have less power in New Zealand's society than white people, and the narrator and his family are suffering as a result of that inequity. This discrimination is also clear in the city planner's condescension towards the narrator. In addition to calling the narrator "Sir" with a sarcastic tone, the city planner also questions the narrator's intelligence multiple times, telling the narrator that the situation with his land is "not so simple," and wondering if the narrator "fully comprehends" the steps involved in subdividing it. Through these subtle forms of racism, the city planner makes clear that the narrator does not hold power in this meeting. When the narrator does act decisively in a conflict, as a traditional hero would, it only underscores his lack of power compared to the city planners. As the argument escalates, the narrator "[kicks] the desk [...] Hard. The veneer [cracks] and [splinters]." At this, the city planners throw the narrator out of the office. Powerless to convince the city planners with **words**, the narrator resorts to violence as a form of resistance. But this resistance is ultimately ineffective: although he does some damage to the planner's desk, he harms himself more, hurting both his foot and his future chances of defending his land. In this way, the story's climactic conflict is one that reveals the narrator's powerlessness due to racial discrimination.

Ultimately, the narrator returns home to his family defeated, in emotional and physical pain. The story therefore places the traditional "hero's quest" format in the context of racial discrimination, asking readers to consider which members of society truly have the power to control their own narratives.

THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE COLLECTIVE

In the beginning of "Journey," the unnamed narrator emphasizes the power of the individual. Free from his nagging family members on his solo trip into the city, he believes he will succeed where others in his family have failed and will be able to convince the city planners to let his family subdivide the land they have lived on for generations. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that the narrator values the collective far more than the individual: since his childhood, his family's bonds have allowed them to survive hard times. In fact, this is the reason the narrator wants to subdivide his land in the first place, so that his 11 nieces and nephews can build their houses and live next to each other. Ultimately, the city planners deny his family this dream, and the narrator returns home to sit in his room alone and contemplate his death. With this ending, the story equates individualization with death and collectivity with survival.

At first, the narrator places a lot of emphasis on the power of the individual. Resisting the way his family treats him as an old man, he thinks to himself as he boards the train that it was a "good idea coming on his own, he didn't want anyone fussing round looking after his ticket, seeing if he's warm and saying things twice." At this point, the narrator feels a sense of freedom in his independence from his nagging family members. Because of this independence, he believes he will be able to succeed in convincing the city planners to let the family subdivide their land. "If he'd gone on his own last time and left those fusspots at home he'd have got somewhere. Wouldn't need to be going in there today to tell them all what's what." As an individual, the narrator believes he has more power to change the family's situation than the family does as a collective. The story therefore begins by suggesting that the narrator values individuality more than collectivism.

However, it soon becomes clear that the collective unit of the family holds much more meaning in the narrator's life than the individual. When the narrator enters the railway station in the city, he remembers that it was where "people came [...] in the hard times to do their starving. They didn't want to drop dead while they were on their own most probably. Rather starve together." For the narrator, being together in a crisis, such as extreme food insecurity, is far better than the certain death of being alone. The family survived these "hard times" by working

together on their **garden**. The narrator remembers helping out in the garden alongside his siblings, growing "great looking veges" and taking them into town to sell, trade, or give away. In this way, the family's collective work on the garden not only ensured their own survival, but also supplied food to their extended community. The fact that the narrator missed school a lot to help in the garden reinforces that for his family, the individual pursuit of education was secondary to this collective struggle for survival. Additionally, the main reason the narrator is traveling into the city in the first place is to try to ensure his family's collective survival on the land. He says to the city planner, "no sense in being scattered everywhere when what we want [...] is to stay put on what is left of what has been ours since before we were born. Have a small piece each, a small garden." In the narrator's plan, the family will survive, as they have for generations before, if they are able to stay on the land together and grow food. Being "scattered," disconnected from each other and unable to grow food on their land, makes the family's survival far more precarious in the narrator's eyes. For the narrator, being part of a collective means survival, while being alone means possible death.

The story's ending again equates being alone with death, as the narrator, unable to prevent the city planners from taking his land away, returns home to sit in his room alone. After hearing that his family will not be able to stay on the land together, the narrator feels alienated from the people around him. He does not confide his thoughts to his nephew, George, to the taxi driver, or to the rest of the family. With the unemotional final lines of the story, he stops sharing his interior mind even with the reader, who is left to wonder what he is thinking about as he "[sits] for a long time looking at the palms of his hands." This shift suggests that the narrator is experiencing a deep sense of isolation. As compared to the beginning of the story, when being alone connoted a sense of power for the narrator, this new, deeper isolation from family members pairs with the narrator's newly apparent fear of death. Afraid that the proposed construction project will unearth his **bones**, he tells his family, "When I go, you're not to put me in the ground [...] burn me up I tell you, it's not safe in the ground." Stripped of the hope of his family's collective survival, the narrator resigns himself to dying alone, his body vulnerable even after death.

In the narrator's worldview, true power comes not from acting alone but from acting as part of a collective. Therefore, in denying the narrator's family a collective future on the land, the city strips them of their power and decreases their chances of collective survival. Thus the story directs readers' attention to the ways that the powerful use division to maintain the status quo.

AGING

Told from the point of view of a 71-year-old man, "Journey" explores the theme of aging. Throughout the story, the narrator must navigate a world that discriminates against him because of his age. At first, he resists this ageism, displaying fierce self-confidence as he travels into the city to attend a meeting about the future of his land. However, after the city appropriates his land, preventing the narrator from leaving a legacy for his family, his confidence is replaced with a sense of alienation and failure. By tracing this decline of the narrator's self-image, "Journey" demonstrates the tragedy of aging in a society that does not respect its elders.

Throughout the story, the narrator must navigate a world that deems him irrelevant because of his age. In the beginning, the narrator's family members condescend to him because of his age. As he is leaving home, they button his coat for him, warn him about the weather, and put money in his pocket. The narrator also feels that, especially in interactions with city officials over the family's land dispute, his family members "[do] his talking for him." These gestures clearly come from a place of care and even respect for the narrator, but they nevertheless relegate him to a position of inferiority because of his age. Additionally, on his train ride into the city, the narrator observes a society that prioritizes rapid change over the traditions of the past. From the fishermen ignoring the narrator's traditional Māori knowledges about weather to development projects that build everything new so that "you'd never know where the old roads had been," the world seems to deem old ways, and therefore elders themselves, irrelevant. Finally, the city planner clearly discriminates against the narrator because of his age. In addition to rudely suggesting that the narrator should not care what happens to his land because he will be dead soon, he calls the narrator "old man" in a derogatory way. Planning to turn his land into a parking lot, the city clearly sees the narrator as an irrelevance, an impediment to new change.

However, in the beginning of his trip, the narrator takes this ageism in stride, displaying self-confidence. He is very optimistic about the meeting, expecting to be able to celebrate his success afterward. This optimism demonstrates that he believes he is capable of asserting himself. He also feels physically able, despite his family's assumptions that he is not. Walking to the meeting rather than riding the bus, he tells himself that "there's nothing wrong with his legs." Additionally, he takes pride in his many years of experience with the landscape, in both the rural and urban settings he travels through. When he gets to the city, he notes that "this bit of sea has been land for a long time now. And he's been in all the pubs and been drunk in all of them." In thinking this, he refuses to be labeled as an irrelevant old man: rather than making him less competent than younger people, the narrator implies, his age only makes him more knowledgeable.

After the unsuccessful meeting with the city planner, in which the city refuses to let the family continue to live on their land, the narrator replaces this self-confidence with a sense of

impotency, physical inability, and pessimism. Unlike the narrator's ancestors, who were able to ensure that the family survived together on the land, the narrator returns home unable to provide security for his nieces and nephews. This inability to leave a legacy fills him with shame, and "he [sits] on the edge of his bed for a long time looking at the palms of his hands." This line, which ends the story, symbolizes the narrator's sense of impotency: his hands, the very hands that helped his family survive starvation by **gardening** on the land, are now no longer able to ensure his family's survival. In the same vein, his foot pains him, because he injured it when he kicked the city planner's desk in frustration. This foot pain, and the limp it causes him to develop, represents a deterioration of his physical ability: whereas before the meeting, there was "nothing wrong with his legs," now he appears far less physically able. This physical disability is paired with a new pessimism about death. Unable to be sure his remains will not be **unearthed** by a future construction project, the narrator shouts at his family to cremate him instead of bury him. Whereas before the meeting, the narrator felt that he was "not so old," the narrator now suggests he may die soon; his shouting this demand demonstrates both a deep pain and a sense of urgency. In this way, the narrator now sees himself the way society seems to—as an incompetent, frail, and irrelevant old man. The narrator therefore internalizes the ageism he experiences, demonstrating the tragedy of aging in a society that does not respect its elders.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GARDEN

The narrator's garden symbolizes the family's collective power and survival on the land in the face of external threats. The garden appears first in the story when the narrator remembers how, in the "hard times" of his youth, there was large-scale food insecurity, and many people gathered in the railway station to "starve together." The garden, planted on the narrator's family's fertile land, ensured the family's survival during these times, providing them with "turnips as big as pumpkins, cabbages you could hardly carry, big tomatoes, lettuces, potatoes, everything." While an older relative was in charge of the garden, every member of the family contributed to the garden work, making it a collective experience. Furthermore, in providing the family with vegetables that they could sell, trade, or give away in town, the garden symbolizes the abundance that comes from collective power: they had enough not only for themselves, but also to give away to their community.

In the present day, the garden itself is under threat, symbolizing the precarity of the family's survival as a collective. The family still relies on the garden as a food source, and it still empowers them through hard work and abundance: the narrator tells the taxi driver that the garden "keeps [him] bent over but it gives us plenty." The family hopes to continue this tradition by subdividing the land so that every family member can "have a small piece each, a small garden." However, the city's plan to turn the family's fertile land into a parking lot, paving over the narrator's garden, eliminates the family's hope of staying on the land together. The loss of the garden therefore symbolizes the end of the family's collective survival on the land.

FORMAL WORDS

Formal words, which stand out amid the story's conversational tone, represent the narrator's lack of power in New Zealand's racist society. In the beginning, the narrator makes a point of using more formal words in his thoughts, such as "journey," "farther afield," and "spectacular." While he thinks these words, he never says them out loud, taking pride in the fact that he knows words that people assume he does not know because of his appearance. In thinking these "special" words, the narrator feels that he can get close to the power they wield. Yet the fact that he does not say these words—because people assume an old Māori man does not have enough education to use them—reveals how anti-Māori racism prevents the narrator from accessing power in New Zealand society.

Words continue to symbolize power in the meeting at the city planning office. The city planner's use of formal words conveys his power as a white elite and conceals his racism. For example, the planner uses formal words to condescend in subtle ways towards the narrator, such as by using the word "Sir" with slight sarcasm. By contrast, the narrator speaks to the city planner in a more conversational tone, symbolizing his lack of power in the situation due to the society's racism. The narrator's climactic act of violence (angrily kicking the city planner's desk) replaces his words altogether: this final lack of words represents the narrator giving up on accessing power in white New Zealand's racist society.

DISPLACED BONES

Both the literal and metaphorical unearthing of human remains symbolize how New Zealand's colonial past haunts its present. On the train, the narrator mentions his belief that construction projects often unearth human bones, "because that's what you get when you dig up the ground, bones." This image of human remains lying just under the surface of new development projects makes clear that New Zealand's history—a history of violent colonization—still very much affects its present. White New

Zealanders may be able to change the way the landscape looks, but they cannot alter its history. This argument appears even more explicitly when the narrator passes a spot where the city bulldozed a graveyard to build a highway. Again, white New Zealanders are attempting to erase evidence of their colonial past, this time by intentionally removing a graveyard. Yet they cannot truly rid themselves of this past: the bones and headstones still remain, "in a heap somewhere."

Much like the bones in the graveyard, the narrator and his family are also being "resited" by the New Zealand government. Using the same deceptively polite language to describe the graveyard, the story draws a connection between the government's view of the graveyard and its racist view of the family's visible Māori identity: both are seen as unpleasant reminders of the country's colonial past, and as such, they must be removed. Like the jumbled bones from the graveyard, the narrator imagines that his family will be broken up and "scattered," erasing their collective Māori identity. Therefore, in the act of concealing evidence of its colonial past, the government continues to colonize in the present.

The story further develops this symbolism when the narrator returns home and expresses his fear that his own remains will be dug up after he dies. The ground, which for the narrator's entire life has represented his family's deep connection to a specific place, now is "not safe," demonstrating the very real threat of colonization that the narrator faces in the present.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Cambridge University Press edition of *Stories of Ourselves* published in 2018.

Journey Quotes

❝ He was an old man going on a journey. But not really so old, only they made him old buttoning up his coat for him and giving him money. Seventy-one that's all.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 320

Explanation and Analysis

The first lines of the story establish its narrative style, with third person narration that is limited to the point of view of the 71-year-old man. The effect of this style is to mix intimacy with distance.

Through the mind of the narrator, the reader experiences his stream of consciousness. Often, this stream of consciousness is disorienting, mimicking the narrator's own disorientation in navigating the changes brought to his area by modernization. In that way, the narration provides an intimate view into the narrator's mind. But the third person narration does not establish any relationship between the reader and the narrator, as a first- or second-person narration would, so the reader remains watching him at a distance. This balance of intimacy and distance strengthens the story's themes of togetherness, as the reader feels a connection to the narrator's inner mind, and alienation, as the reader feels removed from the narrator at the same time.

This quote also develops the narrator's character by exploring themes of age and power. The fact that the narrator chooses to introduce himself first as "an old man" suggests that his age is a topic that carries emotional significance for him. With the next sentence, the reader realizes that is partly because people around him see his age as a limitation or disability, and this treatment "[makes] him old." Age is therefore associated with a lack of control: people make the narrator older simply by seeing him as old. However, the narrator resists being "made old," telling himself that he is "seventy-one, that's all." This quote therefore presents the narrator as a character who resists internalizing others' perceptions of him, or tries to.

❝ People had been peeing in the subway the dirty dogs. In the old days all you needed to do to get on the station was to step over the train tracks, there weren't any piss holes like this to go through, it wasn't safe [...] Good sight though seeing the big engines come bellowing through the cutting and pull in squealing, everything was covered in soot for miles in those days.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 320

Explanation and Analysis

When the narrator leaves the taxi and enters the railroad station, he resents new changes and romanticizes the past in ways that appear illogical. In his memory and in his present experience, the station is a dirty place: the old steam engines covered everything in soot, while in the present, people pee in the new subway. Yet his memory of

the station's past dirt provokes a warm nostalgia while his experience of the station's present dirt provokes anger. His resentment towards the modern therefore seems to stem more from resistance to new change rather than any true dislike of the station's grimy appearance. This illogical reaction opens up the interpretation of the narrator as a silly old man who is unable to adapt to changing times.

However, this quote also foreshadows a much more sympathetic interpretation of the narrator, and a much more critical interpretation of modernization. The forces of modern development buried the once open-air station, turning it into a subway station. By describing the station as less "safe" because of this move underground, the narrator echoes his final statement in the story, when he declares that he does not want to be buried after he dies, because the ground is no longer safe from white developers. In both situations modern development has invaded the ground, making it dangerous.

On the first reading of the story, the reader may interpret this question of safety as simply another irrational complaint from a grumpy old man. But looking back on the quote, the reader sees that complaint as a result of the narrator's overarching feeling of powerlessness and mistreatment at the hands of white developers.

traditional knowledge systems. While the narrator feels that formal English words, such as "journey" and "farther afield," give him a semblance of power in society, by contrast, the narrator feels that these Māori words would not give him much societal clout: they are clearly not relevant for the younger generations. The narrator still takes pride in knowing the Māori words, but the young people only watch the weather report on their modern televisions because "there's nothing else to believe in." The narrator therefore thinks that modernization has disrupted the belief systems of the Māori people.

However, when the narrator returns to his family after his trip into the city, the family mentions *Tamatea Whakapau* again, in their small talk about the weather, suggesting that Māori belief systems may remain more intact than the narrator acknowledges here. Even in the era of modernization, the narrator's younger family members have not forgotten their Māori knowledge completely. Thus, the narrator's observation cannot be read as a statement that the Māori are on the verge of losing their cultural knowledge altogether. Rather, in spite of modernization's threats to Māori knowledge systems, the narrator's family continue to use their Māori language and knowledge in the present day.

> That's something they don't know all these young people...Tamatea a Ngana, Tamatea Aio, Tamatea Whakapau – when you get the winds – but who'd believe you these days. They'd rather stare at their weather on the television and talk about a this and a that coming over because there's nothing else to believe in.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is looking out the window of the train. After remarking that few fishing boats have gone out to sea because of the bad weather, he begins to think about *Tamatea*, a time period in the Māori lunar calendar that brings windy weather.

The narrator's attitude towards these Māori words implies that modernization is hurting the Māori language and

> The two kids stood swaying as they entered the first tunnel, their eyes stood out watching for the tunnel's mouth, waiting to pass out through the great mouth of the tunnel. And probably the whole of life was like that, sitting in the dark watching and waiting. Sometimes it happened and you came out into the light, but mostly it only happened in tunnels.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

As the train enters a series of tunnels on the ride into the city, the narrator watches the reactions of two children sitting next to him. His philosophical observation that "life [is] like that" reflects his lack of agency in his life, complicating his role as the story's heroic protagonist.

Life, the narrator theorizes, is like being swallowed by the tunnel's "great mouth," and waiting to "pass out through [it]." Life is, in the narrator's understanding, a process of being digested: much like food passing through a great mouth, the

simile suggests, the narrator feels as though life is extracting his value, until it finally lets him go as a waste product. This philosophy shows how little agency the narrator has felt in his life, already a far cry from the heroic attitude he displays at the beginning of the story.

The narrator dives further into this simile, describing the experience of being digested by the tunnel of life as "sitting in the dark watching and waiting." The rare moments of entering the light represent the big life moments the narrator has experienced: perhaps a marriage, a death, or a birth. These are the narrator's experiences of being the heroic protagonist in his own narrative. But aside from these few instances, the narrator feels that he has spent his life in a passive way: "sitting," "watching," and "waiting." In this way, the narrator deviates from the archetype of the hero, a protagonist who furthers a story's plot only by acting decisively.

> Funny people these pakehas, had to chop up everything. Couldn't talk to a hill or a tree these people, couldn't give the trees or the hills a name and make them special and leave them. Couldn't go round, only through. Couldn't give life, only death.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 323

Explanation and Analysis

On the train, the narrator observes construction projects outside the window, prompting him to reflect on the differences between pakeha land ethics and Māori land ethics.

Unlike the pakeha, the narrator suggests that Māori people can "talk to a hill or tree," and can "give the trees or the hills a name and make them special and leave them." In talking to natural features of the landscape, the narrator implies, Māori people treat land as if it is a living entity who can understand the words spoken. This relationship leads the Māori to see each natural feature as "special," meaning that they are as uniquely important as any person is. As a result, the Māori "leave" these natural features alone, because killing a sentient creature—whether human, tree, or hill—would be unethical. The narrator therefore shows how Māori land ethics does not observe a binary division between humans and nature.

On the other hand, the pakeha treat the land with violence—they "chop up everything"—because they see land as something entirely distinct from humans, a nonliving object they can manipulate according to their will. They cannot talk to trees or hills, and cannot give them names, because they do not see natural features as sentient beings: only humans hold that title. As a result, the pakeha do not have ethical qualms about ravaging the landscape.

> Railway station much the same as ever [..] Same cafeteria, same food most likely, and the spot where they found the murdered man looked no different from any other spot. People came there in the hard times to do their starving. They didn't want to drop dead while they were on their own most probably. Rather all starve together.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 323

Explanation and Analysis

Upon entering the railway station in the city, the narrator continues to reveal a history of violence hidden in plain sight. The railway station holds violent memories for the narrator: it is where a man was murdered, and where people came to starve during the "hard times." Yet, like the violent history of the development projects he observed from the train, no one seems to commemorate this past. Instead, they go on as if nothing happened, eating food in the cafeteria and walking over the spot where the man was murdered as if it is any other spot.

The order of the passage highlights this contrast. By placing his mundane observations about the cafeteria in the same sentence as his memory of the murdered man, the narrator disorients the reader, cultivating a dissonance between past and present even as he notes that the station is "much the same as ever." In this case, it is exactly this sameness that conceals the dissonant history of violence, as no plaque commemorates the spot where a man was found murdered and where crowds of people starved. Once again, the city ignores its violent history.

> And up there past the cenotaph, that's where they'd bulldozed all the bones and put in the new motorway. Resited, he still remembered the newspaper word, all in together. Your leg bone, my arm bone, someone else's bunch of teeth and fingers, someone else's head, funny people. Glad he didn't have any of his whanaungas underground in that place. And they had put all the headstones in a heap somewhere promising to set them all up again *tastefully* – he remembered – didn't matter who was underneath. Bet there weren't any Maoris driving those bulldozers.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

After exiting the train station, the narrator remembers how the construction of the new motorway destroyed a graveyard, drawing the reader's attention to the human costs of modernizing projects.

In building something new, the construction project destroyed the old. In gruesome detail, the narrator imagines the violence the city inflicted on the graveyard, jumbling the bones and heaping the headstones in a pile. In this way, the displaced bones of the graveyard become a foreboding symbol for the narrator's family, whom the city may also violently displace in order to build a modernizing project. In the meeting with the city planner, the narrator's use of the word "resited" to describe his family's displacement strengthens this symbolism.

It is unclear who was buried in the graveyard, but there are some hints that they may have been Māori. The narrator is glad none of his relatives (*whanaungas*) were buried there, suggesting that other Māori families may have been. Additionally, the narrator bets that "there weren't any Maoris driving those bulldozers," possibly meaning that Māori construction workers would not want to destroy a Māori graveyard. In that case, the destruction of the graveyard, like the eviction of the narrator's family, perpetuates New Zealand's colonial tradition of displacing Māori people in the name of progress.

Finally, it is important that the narrator mentions that the "cenotaph" is close to the site of this graveyard. A cenotaph is often an empty tomb that commemorates someone whose remains are actually elsewhere. Given the disrespect involved in unearthing the graves, it seems unlikely that the cenotaph memorializes them; it is much more likely that the cenotaph commemorates a person or group of people whom white society esteems more highly. As such, the narrator mentions the cenotaph with bitter irony, to highlight the grossly disrespectful treatment of the graves as compared to the cenotaph: next to the unmarked spot where the city has callously displaced so many graves, an empty tomb commemorates someone else.

> They'd be given equivalent land or monetary compensation of course.

But where was the sense in that, there was no equal land. If it's your stamping ground and you have your ties there, then there's no land equal, surely that wasn't hard to understand.

Related Characters: The Narrator, The City Planner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

During the meeting, the city planner assures the narrator that the city will compensate the family for their land. This remark, and the narrator's response to it, clarify the characters' differing perspectives on land ethics and modernization.

On the one hand, the city planner sees land as a means to achieve wealth. In this land ethic, the particular characteristics of the plot of land are irrelevant; only the land's monetary value matters. Seeing land simply as a resource to exploit, the city planner does not understand why the narrator is being so difficult. Additionally, his use of the word "given" implies a sense of entitlement to the land: in framing the compensation as a gift to the family, the city planner implies that the city does not *need* to compensate them, but is choosing to do so out of goodwill. In reality, the family, who are the true owners of the land, has no chance to turn this "gift" down, since the city is forcing them to sell. The city planner therefore continues the colonial tradition of falsely claiming ownership of Indigenous land.

The narrator, on the other hand, does not comprehend the city planner's land ethic. By saying that his family's "ties" are there, he demonstrates the family's interdependence with the land. For them, the land is not an object to sell in order to make money; it is the place that shaped his family's relationships with each other. For this reason, there is "no land equal."

> He was an old man and his foot was giving him hell, and he was shouting at them while they sat hurting. Burn me up I tell you, it's not safe in the ground, you'll know all about it if you put me in the ground. Do you hear?

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 329

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator has returned to his family from his trip into the city, and after not talking to them about the meeting throughout dinner, he finally tells them that they should cremate his body when he dies. The pain of this statement illustrates how the city's land theft has damaged the narrator's self-image and his sense of his relationship to the land.

Whereas in the beginning of the story, the narrator sees himself as a hero who can save his family from the threat of displacement, he now sees himself with shame, as a powerless old man. Unlike his ancestors, who were able to ensure their descendants' continued safety on the land, the narrator only adds to their pain by shouting at them "while they [sit] hurting." And unlike the beginning of the story, when he insists that he is "not really so old," he now sees himself as "an old man." The meeting with the city planner made him feel this way, as his main physical ailment, his foot, is not actually a product of his age but a product of his unsuccessful meeting. Nevertheless, he sees himself as being near death, as he feels an urgent need to tell his family not to bury him after he dies. The passage therefore demonstrates the decline in the narrator's self-image.

Additionally, the narrator's wish to be cremated illustrates the change in the narrator's relationship to his family's land. For his entire life, the land has been a source of food, safety, and abundance. As he tells the city planner, his family's "ties" are in the land; it has shaped their collective identity. His remark that the ground is "not safe" highlights the extent of the narrator's sense of loss. By going through with the development project, the city is severing the narrator's "ties." In stealing the land, the city is stealing the narrator's sense of self. With this loss, the narrator no longer feels safe someday being buried in the land that has sustained him throughout his life; that life-giving relationship has been severed.

> He turned into his bedroom and shut the door. He sat on the edge of his bed for a long time looking at the palms of his hands.

Related Characters: The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 329

Explanation and Analysis

The last line of the story illustrates the extent of the narrator's alienation. Physically, the narrator separates himself from his family by returning to his bedroom alone and shutting the door. This act symbolizes his loss of faith in the possibility of his family's collective survival on the land.

The change in narrative style also illustrates this alienation. Up to this point, the narration has provided the reader with a glimpse into the narrator's mind. By simply describing his actions—turning, shutting, sitting, looking—the narration closes that window, cutting the reader off from the narrator's inner thoughts. Thus, the narrator appears even more isolated, as his connection with the reader is severed, too.

Additionally, this last line highlights the narrator in his final passive state, cementing the narrator's divergence from the hero archetype. For much of the story, the narrator has been sitting and waiting for different forms of transportation. The story is also framed within a longer narrative of the family waiting for the city to grant them permission to subdivide their land. Finally, the story ends with the narrator *still* waiting. But this time, he does not wait with any sense of hope. He seems only to be waiting for death, with the stillness of his hands representing his inability to change the future. In this way, the story denies the narrator a heroic ending.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

JOURNEY

The narrator prepares for his trip into the city to meet officials about his land. He thinks of himself as "an old man going on a journey," though he notes that he is only 71, not really an old man. His family buttons up his coat for him and gives him money, making him feel more like an old man than he wants. While he thinks a "pakeha" (the Māori word for "white person") may have died in this coat because it was second hand, he likes it and isn't afraid of "pakeha *kehuas*" (a white person's ghost), anyway. He goes to the bathroom to avoid having to use the unpleasant lavatories in the city, and then the taxi arrives.

The story emphasizes the narrator's age and race, letting the reader know that these will be important features of his character. The narrator's family treats him as though he is less able than he is, but the narrator resists this categorization. In doing so, he stresses the importance of the individual over the collective and demonstrates that he has self-confidence despite his family's negative implications about his age. By using the word "pakeha," the narrator introduces the concept of racial tension between Māori and white culture, a key part of New Zealand's colonial experience. Finally, by identifying the narrator only as an "old man going on a journey," instead of introducing him with a name, the story casts the narrator in the role of a hero, leaving home on an adventure.

In the taxi, he is in a good mood, happy to be off on his own. The driver observes that he is leaving early in the day, and the narrator responds that he is going out on a business trip that he is confident will go well. He enjoys the familiar smells of the taxi and the sight of the "same old shops," which he notes are doing much better than in the past. After chatting about the narrator's family, they arrive at the train station. The narrator pays the driver and tells him to pick him up at the train station at ten after five in the evening.

Again, the narrator appears self-confident and sees himself as a capable leader of his family. He also continues to value his independence from his family, indicating his prioritization of the individual over the collective. Finally, in noticing that the "same old shops" are doing much better than in the past, he demonstrates a tension between old and new and past and present. This tension is related both to his experience of aging and to the rapid modernization that is occurring in the area.

As he enters the station, he notices that it smells like pee and doesn't feel safe, a sharp contrast to the open-air station filled with impressive steam engines he remembers from his youth. He is annoyed at the shortness of his breath as he climbs the stairs to the platform, and he takes offence at the man in the ticket office, who looks unkempt and scatters the narrator's change instead of handing it neatly back to him. He wants to flip the ticket officer off, which would make him feel less like an old man, but does not.

Again, the narrator shows a clear preference for the past over the negative changes of the present. Additionally, the fact that he is annoyed at the shortness of his breath demonstrates that he does feel the effects of aging but resists them at this point in the story. He also feels a desire to resist the ticket salesman's disrespectful behavior, showing he still has a strong sense of self-respect despite his society's ageism.

Sitting down in the front car of the train, he enjoys the warmth of the heaters and is glad to be free from his family, who fuss over him because of his age. As the train moves, he observes the landscape out the window. Not many fishing boats have gone out on the ocean because of the bad weather, which he attributes to *Tamatea*, an especially windy time period in the Māori calendar. He notes unhappily that young people don't believe in this traditional Māori concept, and instead just watch the weather on the television.

The symbolism of the narrator sitting in the front of the train demonstrates his optimism and self-confidence, despite the world's judgement of his age. He also again values his independence from his family. Additionally, while the narrator still derives meaning from his traditional Māori connection to land, it is clear that the rapidly changing Pakeha world does not respect these concepts—and that's impacting Māori young people as well.

Next, the train passes over a strip of land that used to be sea, where the narrator remembers harvesting *pipis*. He can't harvest here anymore because the pakeha filled this area of the ocean with land and rerouted the train over it, in order to build a bigger road for cars. He doesn't trust this fake land and imagines the train might hop the track into the sea. But the thought of dying doesn't faze him because he's "nearly old anyway." He reflects on the strangeness of people making the sea into land, and observes that they treat the land as if it was meaningless and dead.

The narrator further develops this difference between white New Zealanders' relationships to land and his own Māori land ethics. For the narrator, this piece of land used to be a site that provided sustenance for himself and his family. For the pakeha, who filled the harvest spot in, this piece of land had no inherent value. Because of the modernization, the narrator's connection to this area was severed, demonstrating the detrimental effects that white New Zealanders' land exploitation has on longstanding Māori practices. Additionally, his belief that the train will hop the track in this area is somewhat irrational, yet it again points to the tension between modernization and traditional ways, with the modern being suspect.

The train pulls into the next station, in an area where he has many relatives. He is glad he isn't visiting these relatives because he thinks they, too, would try to meddle in the business about his land. He also observes that this area is full of new development: there are new houses, buildings, and roads; the pakeha have filled another piece of harbor to make more land to build on. The "lunatic asylum" is still there, but these days, he reminds himself, they call it a "psychiatric hospital." As the train moves on, there are more houses, and the narrator remembers the farms that used to be there, wondering if the farmers are dead now—maybe they died rich after selling their land to developers.

As the train nears the city, modernization has an even greater impact on the land, again establishing the tension between new and old. Also, the narrator continues to appreciate his independence from his family, emphasizing his belief in the power of the individual over the collective. Additionally, the narrator's remark about the "psychiatric hospital" is a strange one, foreshadowing themes of mental health that appear later on in his meeting about his land. The remark also develops the symbolism of formal words in the story, pointing to formal language's ability to conceal the true nature of a thing. While the asylum may be renamed a "hospital," the reader has no reason to believe that the institution is more benign than it used to be.

The train begins to pass through tunnels, throwing its passengers into the dark. In between each tunnel, construction machines are building roads through the hills. The narrator bitterly laments this pakeha tendency to destroy the natural world, as well as Māori complicity in these construction projects, as companies often employ Māori people to drive the machines. He compares the exposed ground of the construction projects to open wounds that will "bleed" all over the valley when it rains. He also expects that the projects are unearthing **bones**. At the same time, he reminds himself that these development projects allow people to have housing, food, and transportation, and that people need these things.

The narrator again differentiates pakeha land relations from Māori ones. In order to financially benefit from modern development projects, the pakeha hurt the landscape. In describing this erosion as the land "bleeding," he demonstrates a radically different relationship to land, rooted in Māori beliefs that treat land as if it were itself a living creature, rather than a dead object. In noting that many Māori people drive the machines in these construction projects because they need to make money, the narrator celebrates the Māori's ability to survive colonization but resents the colonial system that forces them to treat the land with such violence. Finally, this passage also introduces displaced bones as a symbol of the clash between New Zealand's past and present.

After exiting the second tunnel, the passengers have a view of the city and its harbor. The narrator observes it with combined awe and weariness: he admires it, but just looking at it makes him tired. The children sitting next to him also stop moving at the sight, "their eyes full to exploding." The quieter of the two children reminds the narrator of a younger family member named George. When George was a child, he would run away to the narrator's house. He would often stay there for a week or more, not speaking or asking for anything, until his mother came to get him. The narrator decides he will try to find George in the city.

The narrator's and the children's reactions to this first glimpse of the city are important for a few reasons. First, following the "hero's quest" myth, the story has established the city as the site of the unknown, where the narrator is expected to experience victory. His fatigue upon seeing it deviates from the role of the hero and foreshadows his eventual defeat. Secondly, the violence in the description of the children's "eyes full to exploding" again recalls the violence of pakeha land relations. Thirdly, the fatigue that the narrator feels seeing the city also indicates that he is feeling the effects of his age. Finally, the awe that all three onlookers experience reflects the power difference between the pakeha, who built the massive city, and the Māori, whose land it occupies. This passage is also critical in developing both George's and the narrator's characters. In describing George running away and not speaking, the story establishes him as a clearly traumatized child, and also a character who refuses to be controlled. In showing the narrator's care for George, the story re-establishes the narrator as a caregiver for his family.

The train pulls into the city's railway station, which the narrator observes is much the same as he remembers. His memories of the station are violent ones: he remembers the particular spot where a man was found murdered; he remembers how, during his youth, many starving people crowded into the station to die together, rather than starve to death alone. He didn't starve, though, because his father cultivated every part of the family's land, growing all sorts of magnificent vegetables that the family could eat, sell, or give away. Often, the narrator and his siblings helped with the **garden** instead of going to school.

By contrasting the more economically stable present with the narrator's memory of past economic crisis, the story suggests that modernization has improved the lives of some New Zealanders. The narrator's family, however, does not seem to have benefitted much from modernizing projects. Instead, their survival has been, and continues to be, tied to their deep connection to the land. The passage also connects survival with being part of a collective, as both the starving people in the train station and the family gardening together are forced to depend on others in hard times.

Back in the present, outside the station, the narrator is early for his meeting, so he decides to walk rather than take the bus, which he doesn't trust. He knows the city well, having spent time in all the different pubs, and thinks that after his meeting has ended, he might go grab a drink to celebrate. He passes a spot where a road construction project bulldozed a graveyard, and remembers how the newspapers reported that the remains were "Resited [...] *tastefully.*" He imagines the **bones** of different people all jumbled up together, and is glad none of his relatives were buried there. He continues on his walk, feeling confident about his upcoming meeting.

The narrator again demonstrates a distrust of the modern, in his disapproval of both the buses and the new road. But while his distrust toward the buses seems illogical, his distrust toward the new road does not, as it stems from his memory of the violent destruction of the graveyard, which symbolizes a pakeha desire to erase New Zealand's colonial past.However, in not allowing this memory to mar his optimism about his future meeting, he conforms to the role of hero in the "hero's quest" narrative pattern.

The narrator's meeting is over; he is back in the railway station. It's too early to catch the train home, so he waits, remembering how the starving people used to wait for death in the station when he was growing up. He looks for George, who is often in the station. The narrator's right foot hurts, and he feels sick. The station is so crowded it feels like the "starvation times."

After his meeting, the narrator seems far less confident and less physically able than he was before, demonstrating a change in his relationship to his age. He also seems to have suffered defeat in the meeting, instead of the victory expected of a hero. Finally, by noting that there are so many people waiting desolately in the station that it feels like the "starvation times" of the past, the narrator makes clear that modernization has not brought economic prosperity to everyone.

He thinks back to the meeting he just had at the city planning office. The city planner he was talking to kept calling him "Sir" in a way "that didn't sound so well" to the narrator. The narrator started out the meeting identifying common ground between himself and the city, agreeing that "people need houses." The narrator understood that the city planned to appropriate his land as part of a new housing development; meanwhile, the narrator explained, he and his now dead siblings had been planning for many years to subdivide the land so that each of his nieces and nephews could build their houses on it. Both sides wanted houses on the land.

The city planner's use of "sir" represents how formal words can become a tool to conceal a darker reality: on the surface, the planner is addressing the narrator respectfully, but the narrator senses that a deeper disrespect hides behind that veneer. Nevertheless, the narrator perseveres with his attempt to find a compromise, placing himself once again in the role of the story's optimistic hero. The compromise he is trying to attain is one between a pakeha relationship with land, symbolized by the desire to profit from land in the form of development, and a Maori relationship to land, symbolized by his family's desire to maintain their generations-long relationship with the land. This desire to stay together on the land also demonstrates the family's prioritization of the collective over the individual.

The city planner responded condescendingly, telling the narrator that it was not so simple. The two began to argue back and forth, with the narrator outlining his plan for subdivision, and the city planner telling him that subdivision was not possible. The city planner was not sure that the narrator understood just how complex and bureaucratic the subdivision process would be, and furthermore, the narrator's land had already been set aside for something else. The narrator assured him he did understand, and that he had the money to pay for the process. But the city planner only offered to compensate his family members with money or "equivalent land." This offer made no sense to the narrator, as the land had been his family's home for generations—no land could possibly be equal. The family had communicated this many times to the city.

The building conflict between the city planner and the narrator is based on their fundamentally different understandings of land. For the city planner, land is a means to attain wealth, so it makes sense to offer to buy the narrator's family out or re-settle them on "equivalent" sites. However, the narrator sees the land as a living entity, one that his family has related to deeply for generations. Just as one relative cannot be sold or exchanged, there cannot possibly be any land equal to his family's land. Additionally, the argument takes on even clearer undertones of discrimination, as the city planner condescends multiple times to the narrator, assuming he lacks intelligence because he is an older Māori man.

After this back and forth, the city planner offered to show the narrator the development plans (although, he pointed out, the narrator would be dead by the time the development was constructed). These plans, crafted by "experts," designated the narrator's land as a parking lot, according to its "suitability and convenience." The narrator was astonished: why would they pave over the most fertile land in the area, and build houses on the rockiest sections? The narrator again refused to be "Resited" on different land, urging the city planner to revise the plans, since they were just drawings on paper, and pointing out that the family owned the land, not the city.

Again, the two cultures' competing land relationships are on full display, as the men argue over who has more expert knowledge about the land. Is it the city, whose "experts" have evaluated the land's "suitability and convenience" for future development? Or is it the narrator, who has tended the land his entire life? For the city, the land is a site of extraction; for the narrator, it is a site of care. Additionally, in planning to pave over the narrator's land, which he rightfully owns, the city is appropriating Māori land in the name of progress, a tradition that has continued since the beginning of New Zealand's colonization. The narrator's use of the word "resited" to describe the city's eviction of his family drives this point home by calling upon the symbolism of the graveyard he passed earlier. In displacing both the family and the bones, the city demonstrates the same kind of dehumanizing violence, treating both human remains and living families as irrelevant relics of its colonial past.

The city planner argued that if the family—whom he calls "you people"—lived all in the same area as the narrator wanted, the land's value would immediately decrease. At this comment, the narrator became very upset, and contemplated punching the city planner, but instead responded that the family didn't want to be "scattered everywhere." The two began talking at the same time, interrupting each other, with the planner continuing to make comments about the narrator's family bringing down the land's value, and the narrator continuing to state his family's desire to stay on the land together and grow food there. Finally, instead of punching the city planner, the narrator kicks the side of his desk, breaking a hole in it and cracking the veneer.

The city's racial discrimination becomes overt when the planner refers to the narrator's Māori family as "you people," a very loaded term that labels its recipient as an outsider, almost always on the basis of race or ethnicity. The fact that the city planner is probably not lying— the real estate value of the development may well decrease if it contained a group of 11 Māori-owned houses—demonstrates the extent of racism in New Zealand's society. In this way, the story shows how the racism established during the country's colonial time period still affects the modern day. Additionally, the conflict continues to distinguish the pakeha tendency to treat land as wealth from the Maori tendency to treat land as a living entity. The narrator's fear of the family being "scattered" demonstrates how he fears individualization. His kicking the desk is symbolic as well: he acts decisively in conflict, like a hero in a climactic battle. In cracking the veneer of the planner's desk (itself a symbol of bureaucracy), the narrator cracks the veneer of the city planner's formal language as well, revealing the racism hiding underneath.

At this, the entire office became quiet. People in the office called the narrator a crazy old man and suggested that he be arrested or hospitalized for insanity, threatening to call their boss to deal with him. The city planner told the narrator to leave, and the narrator did, making sure not to limp.

The threat of being institutionalized for insanity, foreshadowed in the narrator's observation of the psychiatric hospital on the train ride in, demonstrates the power that the city holds over the narrator. This power is rooted in colonial control, as incarceration—putting people in prison—is a historic way that New Zealand's white elite controlled Māori populations. Māori people are still disproportionately represented in New Zealand's prisons. The narrator's age also plays a role in the city planners' violent threats, as they call him a "crazy old man." The narrator's climactic violence was therefore not *a heroic victory, as it only underscores his powerlessness. While he tries to maintain his dignity and positive self-image by leaving the office without limping, he is clearly demoralized.*

Back in the present, at the railroad station, George is sitting next to the narrator. They wait together, not talking much. The narrator does not tell him about the meeting, thinking that it's no use telling George that "you go empty handed and leave nothing behind," because George "had always been empty-handed, had never wanted anything except to have nothing." Finally, the narrator leaves on his train, still trying not to limp.

The degree of the narrator's demoralization is evident in this conversation with George. Although he has been looking forward to talking with George for the whole story, they barely speak a word together, because the narrator is ashamed to tell George that he cannot "leave anything behind" for his family. This is a far cry from the start of the story, when he saw himself as a capable provider for his family, so much so that he resented them for even trying to help out in the negotiations with the city.

The narrator is in the taxi after his train ride back to his hometown station, making small talk with the driver. The driver drops him off in front of his door and compliments the narrator's well-kept **garden**. The narrator promises to give the driver some vegetables the next time he sees him. The driver notices the narrator's limp and asks him if he's alright, and the narrator replies that he's doing great.

The narrator's garden is a reminder of the family's connection to their land and their many generations of collective survival on it. In offering the driver vegetables, the narrator extends this circle of care out to the wider community, just as the family used to do by giving away produce during the "starvation times." However, the narrator's defeat at the meeting has thrown this sense of abundance, collectivity, and survival into question, so that in this context, the garden also represents all that will be lost when the family loses the land.Additionally, the narrator's dishonest reply to the taxi driver, who appears to be a good friend, conveys the narrator's alienation from others as a result of his shame about not being able to secure a future for his family.

Inside his house, the narrator faces the expectant gazes of his family members, who are all wondering about the meeting. Sensing that the meeting went poorly, the family asks about other parts of the trip. The narrator tells them that George is okay. A family member mentions that she heard that George is in a gang, and doesn't wash or go to work, but the narrator replies that George hasn't changed at all. The family goes quiet, waiting for the narrator to talk about the meeting, and finally realizes that he won't.

The narrator returns home from his journey, but he is not a hero returning home to recount his victory to his family. Instead, he tells them nothing, once again demonstrating his alienation as a result of his powerlessness to prevent the city's land theft. The pain that George's absence causes the family is clear as well in this passage, as they talk about his refusal to conform to the norms of society.

Later in the evening, the narrator abruptly tells his family that he does not want to be buried when he dies because the ground is not safe. They should cremate him instead. He yells this at his family, who look hurt. Meanwhile, his foot is becoming very painful. He goes to his room, shuts the door, and sits on his bed for a long time, staring at his hands.

The narrator suffers the pain and powerlessness of land theft under colonization. Not only can he not ensure the future survival of his family, but he also can't even feel secure about his own death, as the land that until now has been a source of care and sustenance has become a threat—today's events have reminded him that the ground is unsafe for Māori remains. This shame and alienation drive him into his room alone, reiterating the connection between individuality and death. There, it is clear that the narrator's self-image has deteriorated, along with his physical ability: he seems like a much older man than he did at the beginning of his trip. Staring at his hands, which until now have helped feed his family, he seems to have given up the fight altogether, and is now waiting passively for his death.

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