

The logo for AUT (Auckland University of Technology) in white text on a black rectangular background.

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

# Inspiring the Magic of Reading & Writing

## A Storylines Story Tour Impact Report

A collaboration between Storylines Children's Literature  
Charitable Trust of New Zealand | Te Whare Waituhi Tamariki  
o Aotearoa and LitPlus Research and Professional Learning  
Community at AUT

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The word "LITPLUS" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, centered within a solid purple rectangular box.The word "Storylines" in a dark blue, serif font, with a small star above the 'y'. A trademark symbol (TM) is at the end. The logo is centered within a white rectangular box.



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## Executive Summary

The Storylines Story Tour Programme aims to develop literacy in students and strengthen connections, connecting authors to readers and books to readers as well as connecting with educational communities across the country to promote reading. Storylines mission of “inspiring children, young adults, and their whānau to enjoy the magic of books and reading” is upheld through their author and illustrator tours around New Zealand. Storylines partnered with the LitPlus research and professional learning community at AUT to research the impact of the Storylines Story Tour programme. Two researchers, (Spencer Emery and Opal Jensen) followed the Central North Island Storylines Tour 2024 to compile data for this report. During the tour, Storylines Story Tours reached the hearts of many school students, teachers, and broader community members around Central North Island by connecting them with authors and books. Storylines Story Tours wish to nurture a love of reading; support New Zealand authors by showcasing their work; and to highlight books as a way of developing cultural identity. Through reviewing field notes, responses to questionnaires and discussions in focus groups with teachers, these goals have been achieved. The Central North Island tour featured local authors and illustrators who discussed their writing process with students, to engage students in reading and writing and explore with them cultural identity and diversity.

### Key Findings

The findings in this report outline the impact of the Storylines Story Tours in New Zealand.

The author talks positively impacted literacy within the participating schools as students were engaged in the presentations, and teachers felt inspired to improve their reading and writing programmes. Connections were formed between students, teachers, and authors, creating a meaningful experience that all parties will remember for a long time. After the

presentations, an inspiring atmosphere was evident with students brainstorming ideas for their own stories, discussing their future writing careers, and looking forward to going to the school library to find books to read. Teachers felt excited about literacy lesson plans, with many new ideas and techniques to engage their students and to enhance their literacy skills. Educators frequently expressed strong enthusiasm for having Storylines visit in the future after seeing the immediate positive impacts the tour had on their schools.

Challenges have been uncovered throughout the research process, including communication within schools, book accessibility, and the Tour's timing for specific schools. The communication issues have been linked to a lapse in communication between school liaisons and staff members. Book accessibility was difficult as the National Library did not have enough copies of the authors' books, and some schools did not have them in their libraries. One school had a writing focus earlier in the year when having a tour might have been even more optimal. Another school would have preferred receiving the authors' information earlier to prepare for the Tour.

The cultural engagement has been outstanding, with many connections to tikanga Māori, Tonga, and Aotearoa, New Zealand. Another strength of the tour was the communication between Storylines and the school liaisons, including receiving the information packs, swift responses, author alignment to different year levels, and ease of overall organisation.

Overall, this investigation shone the light on a very successful, literacy event, the Central North Island 2024 Storylines Tour, where authors inspired the magic of reading and writing in akōnga and kaiako alike.

## Future Opportunities

To maximise the impact of the story tours, Storylines could support schools by:

- Providing information about the authors earlier to schools could help teachers align lessons with students' interests and needs, contributing to overall success
- Holding virtual Q&A sessions with schools to ensure readiness before the visit
- Improving book accessibility through links for purchasing or borrowing from the National Library would further enhance student engagement
- Providing preparation activities based on the authors' work
- Post-visit opportunities, such as writing competitions or follow-up Q&A sessions with authors, could sustain student's interest in literacy.

## Conclusions

Overall, the Storylines Story Tour enhanced students' engagement with literacy by "inspiring children, young adults, and their whānau to enjoy the magic of books and reading." The authors selected for the tour were inspiring, knowledgeable, and well-received. Students and educators were positively impacted by the authors' talks, with results strongly suggesting that literacy levels, reading for pleasure, and writing for pleasure will improve. The participating schools all shared a desire for Storylines to return, noting that they would encourage their wider community to participate in future tours.



## Introduction

Storylines Story Tours aim to promote a love of literacy while building connections between authors, students, and educators. The Central North Island Tour 2024 featured local authors Stuart Lipshaw, Feana Tu'akoi, Michaela Keeble, and Nikki Slade Robinson. These authors brought diverse perspectives and writing styles as a result of their varied cultural and personal backgrounds.

Beyond promoting literacy, the Storylines Story Tours intended to support cultural awareness and explore what it means to be a Kiwi. Stuart Lipshaw is not only a NZ novelist, but also a publisher with Penguin Random House NZ in Auckland. He shared stories rooted in New Zealand's identity, offering insights into some of New Zealand's sports heroes like Kane Williamson, Lydia Ko and Dave Letele. Feana Tu'akoi, based in Hamilton, wove her Tongan heritage into her extensive body of work, incorporating characters, ideas, and traditions that reflect the bicultural and multicultural dimensions of New Zealand. Michaela Keeble, an Australian immigrant with Māori connections, co-authored a children's story with her son which explores Māori values through storytelling. Nikki Slade Robinson, a Taupō-based illustrator and author, sparked children's imagination with her animal illustrations and New Zealand-based stories. Together, these authors aimed to encourage in students a love of reading and writing through engaging them in discussion on themes of cultural identity and the diversity that defines New Zealand.

This report evaluates the impact of the Storylines Story Tours on fostering literacy engagement among school children. For teachers, the report provides an opportunity to review the effectiveness of the tours for their students and refine strategies to build a more robust literacy culture. For Storylines Trust, the research offers valuable data to inform and improve future tours while identifying more effective ways to support the schools they visit.

The Central North Island story tour visited thirteen schools over five days. These schools included Lake Taupō Christian School, Tauhara College, Hilltop School, Tongariro School, Kuratau School, Whakamaru School, Ngākuru School, Aorangi School, St. Mary's School, and John Paul College. These predominantly rural schools often have limited access to opportunities to host visiting authors and illustrators. Throughout the tour, the researchers observed and gathered data to assess the tour's impacts on reading and writing.

## Evaluating the tour

A questionnaire, with eleven questions, was sent to the thirteen schools who participated in the Central North Island Storylines Tour 2024. The questionnaire was completed by eleven school staff members across the schools. The questions were co-constructed by the authors, a team of four AUT LitPlus researchers and two individuals from Storylines Trust who ensured that the questions targeted Storylines goals and reviewed logistics and other important aspects to enhance future Story Tours.

Working with LitPlus researchers, two postgraduate student researchers developed protocols for semi-structured interviews. After each author talk, a small group of teachers were invited to a focus group session to answer a series of questions and share their perceptions of the impact of the Storylines Story Tours on literacy engagement and to consider the efficacy of the tour organisation and support.

Responses from these interviews and the questionnaire data were reviewed and analysed for this report alongside researcher observations, field notes, and information packs provided by Storylines to provide a fuller picture of the tour.

## Results

Following the questionnaire's structure, the responses have been collated to understand how the Storylines Story Tours Programme supported literacy engagement across Central North Island schools. Field notes from observations and focus groups have been used to support and bring context to these responses. The results are presented below using the questions from the questionnaire as subheadings. A focus group was held at each of the thirteen schools and sixteen individuals completed the questionnaire online.

*When and how did you first hear/become aware of the Storylines Story Tour coming to your region?*

All of the schools had heard about the Tour online or through word of mouth. One teacher said, "Our school have subscribed to Storylines for many years. I started 6 years ago and have had tours every year."

*Who was involved in making the decision to book the Story Tour for your school/library/community group?*

Four librarians, six principals, and three English/Literacy department members made the decision.

*What is the preferred format of receiving notification about the Story Tour?*

Ten schools preferred email notification, while one school favoured an e-newsletter.

*Did you receive sufficient information from Storylines to make an informed decision?*

All respondents felt they had received sufficient information.

*If you were a first-time host, did Storylines provide adequate guidance on how to prepare?*

Five of the thirteen schools were first time hosts. Each school was sent an email with information packs which included details about each author, their desired year levels, group sizes, their books, and what they planned to discuss. Storylines provided suggestions to prepare students for the talks, the authors' needs, talk timeframes, author introduction guidelines, information about Storylines, and key information about the day's proceedings. From field notes and observations, any teachers who expressed a lack of preparation attributed this to a lack of communication within their own school rather than from Storylines.

*Upon learning who the presenters would be, did you ensure that books by the presenters were available for students before the visit?*

Ten of the thirteen schools said 'yes'. Conversations with teachers during the focus groups suggest schools had some difficulties with finding the books online to purchase, and the National Library did not have enough books for the schools to request. When asked, one author explained that their books are no longer being published and are therefore hard to find. These factors could have contributed to the four who said they did not have the authors' books available for the students before the visit. Many educators claimed they would order the authors' books after the presentations.

*How do you think providing the presenters' books has impacted the students' experience?*

For those schools who had purchased the books, all of the responses were positive, with an overwhelming response of students reading the authors books directly after the talks. One teacher said, "It made the author "real" to the boys, who were sadly so enthused, that two of her [the author's] books have been stolen since the event."

*How prepared did you feel on the day of the Story Tour?*

Nine schools felt well prepared, six felt adequately prepared and one felt not well prepared.

The field notes and observations suggested those who felt unprepared were affected by miscommunications within the schools. Many teachers felt unprepared as they did not receive the tour information from the school liaison who was in contact with the Storylines co-ordinator. One teacher from a focus group said that they would have liked more information; "Maybe a little bit around who the sessions are focused at or who might benefit."

*Were there any challenges in maximising the opportunity presented by the visit?*

Four said yes and twelve said no. The challenges that the teachers experienced were related to factors outside of Storylines' control. These included scheduling difficulties within school hours, an IT issue, and not having all students present for the talk.

*What follow-up activities or resources provided by Storylines would encourage further learning and exploration to be utilised?*

In the focus groups, the teachers indicated that there would be continued reading, illustrations, and writing done in their classrooms to encourage further learning and exploration. Future suggestions teachers suggested included reading with students, webinars with the authors organised by Storylines, Q&A sessions, writing competitions judged by the authors, authors leaving materials for students to find out more about the authors or to complete a relevant activity. Since our observations and the questionnaire responses suggested there was difficulty in locating the authors' books, perhaps Storylines could help them access books related to the talks.

*What would encourage you to join or engage more actively with Storylines?*

All responses were positive, and the majority had no further suggestions. The few suggestions included: a website with resources, more advanced notice, more than one visit, and quarterly emails with information, news, and competitions for students.

The focus group discussions provided additional data that highlighted strengths of the Tour. A recurring theme during the focus groups was the cultural responsiveness and engagement promoted by the tour. Teachers articulated their appreciation of the pairing of authors to age levels, ensuring the material was relatable and impactful for the students; a collection of short stories resonated with the older students who recognised their New Zealand heroes. An author's wide variety of books connected with many students who were fascinated by the editing process and everything that goes into creating a book. Picture books were appropriate for the younger students, who enjoyed the illustrating process and using the pictures to follow the story.

The authors strongly focused on biculturalism and multiculturalism, resonating with the diverse communities within the schools. As one teacher noted, "I think that anytime you bring outside artists and literature into the school, then it aligns with the curriculum, especially when it is strongly cultural and strongly Aotearoa-focused." Another teacher endorsed using a pepeha at the beginning of the talk as their students instantly connected with the author, "Opening the whole thing with her pepeha is just perfect. Just saying that, this is me." These examples display how the authors' cultural responsiveness is a powerful tool for building connections and understanding with students.



## Discussion

### Engagement

A notable strength was how students perceived the authors as 'real' people. A teacher said, "A lot of people think that being a writer is out of reach, so seeing a real author makes it seem more achievable." The teachers appreciated the authors sharing meaningful messages, such as "It's okay to make mistakes, and if you're not doing that, then you are not learning, and I think that really made a huge difference to our boys." A particular strength was how the authors reached all students; "The kids that struggle with writing or tend to fear writing were the ones that were the most engaged." These connections between students, educators, and authors sparked enthusiasm for literacy, demonstrating the effectiveness of direct interactions with professional authors. The excitement was further reflected in teacher observations, "You could tell they were engaged by the amount of hands up and the laughing at the right times." One teacher reflected on how it has influenced students after the author talk, "I remember every time that we have had Storylines authors in here, they have been passionate about what they have done, and that has rubbed off on to the students and the teachers." These statements display how Storylines Trust meets its mission of "inspiring children, young adults, and their whānau to enjoy the magic of books and reading, specially created by New Zealand authors and illustrators."

### Preparation

Preparation was a critical factor influencing the success of the talks. Responses from our questionnaire revealed that some schools did not feel prepared leading up to the authors' talks. Observations suggest this was often due to internal challenges at the school rather than shortcomings from Storylines. For example, some teachers were unaware of session details or, in some cases, the visit themselves because the school liaison had not communicated it effectively. In schools that engaged in pre-visit preparations, such as making the authors' books available, the researchers noted a stronger connection between the author and students, enhancing the overall experience. At one school, the students had prepared questions based on the author's books and prior research, which they had completed in class. This made the experience more impactful for the students and the author, who was pleasantly surprised at the students' insightful questions and prior knowledge. From the researchers' data, it is clear that incorporating a pre-visit activity, having authors' books available, and awareness of the presentation proceedings deepened the students' engagement and enriched the discussions during the sessions, maximizing the interactions with the author.

### Communication

Communication from Storylines to schools was identified as a strength, particularly through the effective use of email. The questionnaire highlighted the practicality and preference for email as the primary communication tool. Prior to the author talks, information packs were sent to the schools, outlining the proceedings of the upcoming event. These information packs included author profiles and preparation guidelines. The 2024 Tour was the first experience for many schools, who are now interested in participating in future tours. As focus groups concluded, educators often said, "Please come back." This shows how impactful the presentations were and how positive the experience was for educators, organisers, and students. One teacher shared, "Our school has subscribed to Storylines for many years. I started six years ago and have had tours every year," reflecting the consistency and reliability of the process for long-term school participants.

## Challenges

Our research has discovered many positives, with only a few challenges emerging. These include communication within schools, accessibility to authors' books, and the Tour's timing for specific schools. Although Storylines provided detailed information for the schools, the information was not always shared internally. This disconnect came from a lapse in communication between the school liaison and school staff. Strengthening internal communication at the schools would address this gap. In addition, accessibility to the authors' books was a challenge for some schools. The questionnaire results showed that 73% of schools had the authors' books available, while other schools did not have access to the books due to certain titles being out of print or unavailable through the National Library. Despite not being asked about purchasing books as this is not something within Storylines' activities, teachers in three schools talked about being not being able to order the books for their classrooms or for the library. This limited the students' ability to familiarise themselves with the authors' work beforehand, and their eagerness to read the books after the talks. Access to these books in the future could enhance teacher and student preparation and improve connections with the authors and their stories. Issues outside Storylines control, such as tight schedules, I.T. problems, and partial attendance due to school events, were observed. Additionally, the presentations overlapped with curriculum areas, which could have been more relevant for teachers and lesson plans at certain times of the year. For example, two teachers wished that the talk came at the beginning rather than the end of the year so that "we could use it as a springboard into their writing." One school mentioned that they were informed about the Storylines Story Tours well in advance but wished they had known the specific authors earlier to prepare better and maximise the visit's potential.

## Outcomes and future opportunities

### Outcomes

Overall, the response from the Storylines Story Tours has been positive. Particularly, students are perceived to be reading for pleasure and aspiring to write more. One teacher shared, "One boy walked up to me and said, 'We should write a book.', and this is a boy who doesn't write." Another remarked, "This may have ignited a flame in some of them because an expert has come in and talked to them." The presentations inspired educators to share the magic of reading and writing within their classes: "It inspired me as a teacher. I can really see the joy in writing."; "Oh gosh, I've written so many notes." Teachers took on the authors' recommendations to publish their students' work in their school and class libraries enthusiastically. This shows the authors' talks' impact on the schools' reading and writing culture. Storylines was able to reach rural schools on their tour. The school staff particularly noticed this and praised the organisation for including their schools, which are often overlooked and do not have access to such opportunities. Author talks are important as they ignite an interest in literacy, make writing seem a viable career, and enhance creativity. This is a strength that Storylines should continue to uphold.

### Future opportunities

The data suggests further opportunities for the tours to be enhanced. These include providing authors' information earlier, holding Q&A sessions, improving book accessibility, sharing preparation activities, and post-visit initiatives.

Providing authors' information earlier would further enhance the presentations as schools can scaffold the talks and match students with the authors based on commonality and interests. A strong suggestion was having a virtual Q&A session with Storylines prior to the talks. This would allow the

schools to ask questions and clarify details about the upcoming talks while creating excitement. This approach may also address the issue around internal communication.

The questionnaire responses show that some schools found it difficult to source the authors' books. This issue could be addressed by including links in the information packs to purchase the authors' books, links to order the books from the National or local library, with an emphasis on doing this early, and digital access for students, including audiobooks if available. In the case of one author on this tour, their books are no longer in print, ensuring that authors joining the tours have books that are currently available could also be considered.

Additionally, providing schools with preparation and follow-up activities would optimise the experience for the students. Preparation activities could include creating questions for the authors, illustrating a character from their books, creating a short piece of writing to share with the author, researching the authors, and more. Following on from the talks, leaving materials for schools to build on the visit would strengthen the impact of the authors' visit. Post-visit activities could include summarising what students learned, what inspired them, and what they would like to do next, as well as online Q&A sessions with authors, writing prompts, and writing competitions judged by the authors. Building on a visit is beneficial as it leaves a lasting impact on the students. One teacher said, "You refer back to anecdotes about interactions with authors and interactions with illustrators."

These future recommendations were drawn from school staff's responses to the questionnaire and field notes from the focus groups and observations. These further opportunities and recommendations would enhance students' reading and writing for pleasure and build on the experience. As one teacher said, "If her coming and doing that presentation, if that sparks three kids, ... if you ignite three out of that room, you're a winner." Storylines provides students with a meaningful experience to reflect on and ignite their creativity and self-actualisation within literacy.