

Read the passage and then answer the following questions as fully as you can.

1. When do you think the passage is set?
2. How would you describe the mood that is established by the opening paragraph?
3. Explain **in your own words** what the description of the canoes “making long cracks on the surface sheen” (line 18 &19) means.
4. a) What do you think the land and sea is waiting for in the first half of the passage?
b) Find two phrases from the whole passage to support your answer.
5. Who do you think the Ancients are? Give a reason for your answer.
6. Reread lines 28-36. Explain in as much detail as you can the things that make the whale so powerful.
7. What happens to the spears the whale rider throws to land and sea?
8. Why do you think the whale rider is unable to throw the final spear?
9. What do you imagine the whale rider might be saying when he cries out “Karanga mai” in line 56?

In the old days, in the years that have gone before us, the land and the sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains were like a stairway to heaven, and the lush green rainforest was a rippling cloak of many colours. The sky was iridescent, swirling with the patterns of wind and clouds; sometimes it reflected the prisms of rainbow or southern aurora. The sea was ever-changing, shimmering and seamless to the sky. This was the well at the bottom of the world and when you looked into it you felt you could see to the end of forever.

This is not to say that the land and the sea were without its vivacity. The tuatara, the ancient lizard with its third eye, was standing sentinel here, unblinking in the hot sun, watching and waiting to the east. Within the warm stomach of the rainforests, birds foraged for succulent insects. The forests were loud with the clatter of tree bark, chatter of insects and murmur of fish-laden streams.

The sea, too, teemed with fish but they also seemed to be waiting. They swam in brilliant shoals, like rains of glittering dust, throughout the greenstone depths. Sometimes from far off a white shape would be seen flying through the sea but it would only be the serene flight of the stingray with the spike on its tail.

Waiting. Waiting for the seeding. Waiting for the gifting. Waiting for the blessing to come.

Suddenly, looking up at the surface, the fish began to see the dark bellies of the canoes from the east. The first of the Ancients were coming, journeying from their island kingdom beyond the horizon. Then, after a period, canoes were seen to be returning to the east, making long cracks on the surface sheen. The land and the sea sighed with gladness:

We have been found.

The news is being taken back to the place of the Ancients.

Our blessing will come soon.

In that waiting time, earth and sea began to feel the sharp pangs of need, for an end to the yearning. The forests sent sweet perfumes upon the eastern winds. The sea flashed continuously with flying fish leaping high to look beyond the horizon and to be the first to announce the coming; in the shallows the chameleon seahorses pranced at attention. The only reluctant ones were the fairy people who retreated with their silver laughter to caves in glistening waterfalls.

The sun rose and set, rose and set. Then one day, at noon, the first sighting was made, on the horizon, a dark shape rising from the greenstone depths of the ocean, awesome, huge, breaching through the surface and hurling itself skyward before falling seaward again. Underwater the muted thunder boomed like a great door opening far away, and both sea and land trembled from the impact of that downward plunging.

Suddenly the sea was filled with awesome singing, a song with eternity in it, a song to the land. The dark shape rising, rising again. A whale, gigantic. A sea monster. Just as it burst through the sea, a flying fish leaping high in its ecstasy saw water and air streaming like thunderous foam from that noble beast and knew, ah yes, that the time had come.

Then the flying fish saw that astride the head of the whale, as it broke skywards, was a man. He was wondrous to look upon, the whale rider. The water streamed away from him and he opened his mouth to gasp in the cold air. His eyes were shining with splendour. His body dazzled with diamond spray. He seemed, with all his strength, to be pulling the whale into the sky.

Rising, rising. And the man felt the power of the whale as it propelled itself from the sea. He saw far off the land long sought and now found, and he began to fling small spears seaward and landward on his magnificent journey toward the land.

45 Some of the spears in mid-flight turned into pigeons which flew into the forests. Others on landing in the sea changed into eels. And the song in the sea drenched the air with ageless music and land and sea opened themselves to him, the gift long waited for: man. With great gladness and thanksgiving the man cried out to the land.

Karanga mai, karanga mai, karanga mai

50 But there was one spear, so it is told, the last, which, when the whale rider tried to throw it, refused to leave his hand. Try as he might, the spear would not fly.

So the whale rider uttered a prayer over the wooden spear, saying, "Let this spear be planted in the years to come, for there are sufficient spear already implanted. Let this be the one to flower when the people are troubled and it is most needed."

55 And the spear then leapt from his hands with gladness and soared through the sky. It flew across a thousand years. When it hit the earth it did not change but waited for another hundred and fifty years to pass until it was needed.