

Personal Response

This personal response is based on the short story The Seahorse and the Reef by Witi Ihimaera.

Character

- **Most of the main events revolve around** the narrators Māori whanau, who loved going to the coast to gather kai moana. As much as they enjoyed eating shellfish, the short story also revealed that the whanau used their time at the beach to socialize with other Māori families **because** it enabled them all to have fun, share news and enjoy their tribal ways. In The Seahorse and the Reef it says “For both mum and dad, much of the fun of going to the reef was because they could be with their friends and whanau. It was a good time for being family again and enjoying our tribal ways” (p.19).

Idea/Theme

- **I felt strongly about the idea that** we all have a responsibility to look after our natural resources as they are so vulnerable to exploitation. In the short story The Seahorse and the Reef the Māori whanau were too late to protect the kai moana at the reef and I could feel their anguish as they realised that the resource their families had used for generations had been spoiled by pollution. I think that Māori have an important role to play in conservation and that they are kaitiaki or guardians of our natural environment. The old people always passed on their wisdom to their mokopuna (grandchildren) and in the story the father tells his son “Kids you must take from the sea only the kai you need and only the amount you need to please your bellies. If you take more, then it is a waste” he also goes on to say that “And do not leave litter behind you when you leave the sea” (p.20).

Structure

- **The story built to a climax when** the narrator recalls going down to the beach with his Māori whanau and seeing all of the other families staring ‘impassively’ (p.20) out towards the reef. Then his father read a sign posted on the beach during the night and (incensed with rage) explains to his son that it is dangerous to take food from the sea. I could feel the distress of the Māori people especially when the old kuia began her haunting cry to the sea “It was a very sad song for such a beautiful day. ‘Aue...Aue...’” (p.21). I understood this to mean that she was grieving for Tangaroa – Lord of the Ocean and for all of his children that were dying in the polluted water. What struck me as even more heart wrenching was the way the narrators father asked for forgiveness from the sea and described the harm done as having “...lost our aroha for you and our respect for

your life” (p.20). For Māori, the natural environment is seen as an extension of life, an extension of Māori born from the love of Papatuanuku (earth mother) and Ranginui (sky father).

Title

- **The title is significant because** it explains how significant the seahorse was as a taonga (treasure) from the sea. The narrator explained how entranced the children were by discovering the seahorse in the rock pool and then shared the loss that they felt when they realised that such a beautiful creature would perish in the polluted ocean. The narrator says “And flashing through dead waving seaweed was a beautiful seahorse, fragile and dream-like, searching frantically for clean and crystal waters” (p.21). What struck me as most significant was the fragility of the natural environment and how vulnerable it is to human destruction.