

MAUI AND THE SWAMPHEN

A lesson taken from *The Third Pacific Reader* – a school text book used in the 1930s by Standard III (Year 5) pupils.

1. Perhaps the greatest of Maori heroes was Maui. One of the many legends that have been handed down about his doings tells how he noosed the Sun God.
2. In those far-off times the days were very short indeed, because the Sun God travelled across the sky very hastily. He would rise in the east, rush across the sky and set in the west before men had time to finish their work.
3. Now Maui thought he would be doing a great service to mankind, if he could lengthen the days, by forcing the Sun God to travel more slowly. His idea was to catch the Sun in a noose of ropes, and tie him fast until he promised to go more slowly on his daily journey.
4. Now it happened that, when Maui was fighting with the Sun, he was nearly dying with thirst. He called upon the bird-folk to bring him water to drink.
5. It was the swamphen who came to help Maui. In those days the swamphen was not as he is today, a lonely bird who fishes for himself in the quiet riverbed, and who flies slowly with his head low, as if caught doing something wrong.
6. Nor had he the new bill – the poor nose which is as red as a *kowhai* flower, and of which he is now so ashamed. No, he was a lively bird, friendly with men, and proud of his blue coat, and his fine black bill.
7. Well, it was the swamphen who carried water up to Maui. No other bird was brave enough to venture out that day, for the angry Sun God was shaking his great red wings to frighten Maui; and the air was full of sparks and burning feathers, and red hot splinters of rock. All the other birds hid under cliffs and trees; but the swamphen was so sorry for thirsty Maui who was fighting for the good of man and birds, that he filled a little skin bag with water and flew up to the sky with it.
8. He had to fly up in rings, like a corkscrew, so as not to get burnt with the flaming feathers, but at last he reached the blue top; and then Maui drank and got strong again. Then he gave one great pull, and the Sun was beaten. He stopped shaking his great wings, and promised always to go slowly so that men could see to do their work. Then Maui thanked the swamphen, and changed his short stumpy legs into very long legs, so that he could go fishing in the swamp without taking cold.

SPELLING LISTS, NOTES, AND ENGLISH EXERCISES

MAUI AND THE SWAMPHEN

leg'-end	trav'-elled	hast'-I-ly	ser'-vice
jour'-ney	ko'-whai	ven'-ture	thirst'-y
for'-tu-nate	gi'-ant	Ma'-or-is	height
i-de'-a	a-shamed'	dai'-ly	wrong

Maui: pronounce mah'-oo-ee.

heroes: those who do brave deeds

legends: stories handed down.

kowhai: there are two plants of this name, native to New Zealand – the Red Kowhai, a drooping shrub with scarlet flowers shaped like a kaka's beak, and the Yellow Kowhai, a tree from 30 to 40 feet high with masses of yellow blossoms.

fortunate: lucky

fare: food

loyal: faithful, true

ENGLISH EXERCISES

- 1 Join the following sentences by the word *because* : -
 - (a) The Sun God travelled too fast. Maui made up his mind to noose the Sun God.
 - (b) The swamphen carried water up to Maui. Maui rewarded the swamphen.
- 2 Complete the sentences begun below : -
 - (a) Only the swamphen was brave enough
 - (b) The Maoris have many legends
 - (c) Maui fought
 - (d) The swamphen's legs
- 3 Write six sentences about the swamphen as we know him today.