

THE RISING TIDE

TEACHER GUIDE

William F. Porter

Years 10-13

THE OPENING CHALLENGE

You are the chief of eighty people who have just landed on a remote beach in an unknown country. What do you do first?

A classroom resource for English, Social Sciences, History, Geography, Economics and Business Studies.

Free educational resource • SouthSeasPublishing.com

1. About this guide

The Rising Tide is an alternative-history novel beginning in Aotearoa in 1300. It imagines a small Māori community choosing political unity, exploration, trade, education and technological development as deliberate strategies for survival and growth. The story expands from local survival and first contact to long-distance voyaging and contact with the wider trading world.

The novel is fiction. Its characters, iwi, events and dialogue are imagined, although the book draws on the history, language and culture of Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori words are used throughout, with a glossary at the end of the novel.

TEACHER PRINCIPLE

Use the novel as a starting point for historical reasoning, not as a substitute for historical evidence. Students should repeatedly distinguish between what is historically grounded, what is plausible inference, and what the author has invented.

Suggested use

- Whole-class novel study in Years 10–13.
- Selected-chapter study for English, History or Social Sciences.
- Cross-curricular activities in economics, geography and business.
- Author-visit preparation or follow-up.
- Independent extension work on alternative history and counterfactual reasoning.

Learning goals

- Analyse how decisions create consequences across a narrative.
- Evaluate leadership, incentives, trade-offs and competing priorities.
- Interpret maps, routes, resources and geographic constraints.
- Separate historical evidence from fictional extrapolation.
- Support claims with evidence from the text.

2. Historical and literary background

Alternative history

Alternative history asks what might follow if a historical event, decision or development took a different path. The value of the form is not predicting what “would” have happened. It is testing causation: which conditions matter, which choices matter, and what constraints remain even after the divergence?

Key question: What is the divergence point in *The Rising Tide*, and which later developments depend upon it?

Polynesian voyaging

- Waka hourua and other ocean-going craft.
- Wayfinding through stars, winds, swells, birds, clouds and accumulated knowledge.
- The settlement of islands across the Pacific over many generations.

Early Māori society

- Iwi and kinship relationships.
- Leadership, alliance, exchange and conflict.
- Resource use, food security and seasonal constraints.
- The importance of specialised knowledge and skilled labour.

LANGUAGE NOTE

Encourage students to use the novel’s glossary when Māori terms are unfamiliar. Avoid treating English glosses as complete definitions: context, usage and cultural meaning matter.

3. Launch lesson: eighty people on a beach

Time: 35–50 minutes • Best before students read Chapter One

Scenario

STUDENT BRIEF

You are responsible for eighty survivors who have landed on a remote beach in an unknown country. You do not know who else lives there. You cannot assume rescue. Decide what happens next.

Step 1 – Individual priorities (5 minutes)

Rank these from 1 (most urgent) to 10: fresh water; food; shelter; fire; defence; exploration; boat repair; leadership/governance; care for injured people; contact with other inhabitants.

Step 2 – Allocate people (10 minutes)

Allocate all eighty people to tasks. Students must account for every person and explain what skills they need in each group.

Step 3 – The first week (10 minutes)

Choose three projects that must be completed within seven days. What will you deliberately postpone? What risks does that create?

Step 4 – Complication (5 minutes)

Tell the class: smoke has been seen beyond the headland. Another community is nearby. Do they approach, hide, fortify, observe or trade?

Step 5 – Read and compare

After reading the opening chapters, compare the class plan with Te Rangatira's decisions. The task is not to decide who is "right", but to identify assumptions, risks and consequences.

4. Leadership and nation-building

The novel repeatedly asks whether a society can become stronger by widening cooperation rather than simply defeating rivals. Te Rangatira's leadership can therefore be studied as a sequence of choices under constraint.

Discussion questions

- What does Te Rangatira understand about the vulnerability of a very small population?
- When does persuasion work better than command?
- What are the costs of absorbing or allying with other groups?
- Does political unity require a shared enemy, shared prosperity, shared identity, or all three?
- At what point does the motu become more than a collection of iwi?
- How should succession be decided when inherited authority and demonstrated ability point in different directions?

Evidence task

Choose three decisions made by Te Rangatira. For each, record: the immediate problem; the options available; the choice made; short-term consequence; long-term consequence; and one plausible alternative outcome.

EXTENSION

Compare Te Rangatira and Whetu as leaders. Does a society need different kinds of leadership at different stages of development?

5. Trade versus warfare

Trade is not presented as the absence of conflict. It is another means of acquiring resources, relationships and strategic advantage. Students can examine when exchange creates mutual benefit and when unequal power changes the bargain.

Core questions

- Why does Te Rangatira favour trade as a route to strength?
- What can trade obtain that conquest cannot?
- What does each side need in order for exchange to continue?
- How do transport costs and scarcity change value?
- When does military strength make trade safer, and when does it make trade coercive?
- Are there moments in the novel when warfare is unavoidable? Defend your answer.

Mini-debate

Motion: “Trade creates more lasting power than conquest.” Assign affirmative and negative teams. Each team must use at least four events from the novel and distinguish short-term from long-term power.

Exit ticket

Complete: “The most important thing the iwi gains through trade is not wealth but _____, because _____.”

6. Economics: scarcity, value and comparative advantage

The status blocks in the novel track population and estimated net worth. They are a narrative device that makes changing productive capacity visible and invite economic questioning rather than providing historical statistics.

Activity A – Why does value change?

Select three traded resources from the novel, such as pounamu, tūhua/obsidian, spices, metals or sails. For each, identify who values it, why it is scarce, what substitutes exist, and what transport is required.

Activity B – Comparative advantage

Create two fictional communities based on locations in the novel. Give each different resources and skills. Students decide what each should specialise in and what they should exchange. Then introduce a transport cost or storm risk and reconsider the bargain.

Activity C – Opportunity cost

Every skilled person sent on a voyage is unavailable at home. List the benefits of sending navigators, builders and interpreters abroad, then list the production or security lost while they are away.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Net worth in the novel is an authorial way of representing growing resources, infrastructure and productive capacity. It should not be treated as a literal reconstruction of a fourteenth-century monetary economy.

7. Population, labour and power

Population is one of the novel's recurring constraints. A community can possess resources and ideas but still lack enough people to defend territory, crew vessels, produce food and build infrastructure at the same time.

Data activity

Choose six chapter status blocks spread across the novel. Record men, women and children for the iwi and motu. Calculate absolute growth and percentage growth between selected points. Annotate each change with the narrative event most likely to explain it.

Questions

- Why might total population be a poor measure of immediately available labour?
- How does migration change the society differently from natural population growth?
- Why does a larger population create both strength and new food demands?
- What happens when skilled labour becomes the scarce resource?
- How might age structure matter to defence, voyaging and future growth?

Extension

Design a "labour budget" for a settlement of 500 people. Decide how many adults are required for food production, construction, defence, childcare, education, fishing, exploration and trade. Explain the compromises.

8. Innovation and the accumulation of knowledge

Whetu's role makes innovation visible as a process: observation, experimentation, failure, adaptation, teaching and preservation of knowledge. Later contact introduces unfamiliar materials and technologies, but access alone does not guarantee useful adoption.

Discussion questions

- Which innovation changes the iwi's possibilities most dramatically?
- What is the difference between inventing something and learning to reproduce it reliably?
- Why is teaching as important as discovery?
- How do boats, sails, tools and weapons alter other parts of society?
- Why might a useful technology still be rejected or delayed?
- Does contact with societies using unfamiliar technologies accelerate change? How?

Technology chain

Choose one innovation. Draw a chain showing prerequisites → invention/adoption → immediate effect → second-order effect → unintended consequence. Add at least one point where the chain could have failed.

AVOID TECHNOLOGICAL RANKING

Rather than describing whole societies as "advanced" or "backward", compare particular technologies, institutions, resources and forms of knowledge in their specific contexts.

9. Geography and the ocean

The ocean in *The Rising Tide* is both road and barrier. Distance, wind, currents, water supply, reefs and safe harbours shape what the characters can attempt.

Map task

On a blank Pacific/Indian Ocean map, locate and label: Aotearoa; Isle of Pines/Kunié in New Caledonia; Queensland; the Spice Islands/Maluku; and Java. Trace the principal voyage sequence described in the novel.

For each location, annotate:

- What draws the voyagers there?
- What resource, knowledge or relationship is gained?
- What geographic hazard must be managed?
- How does the location connect to the next stage of the network?

Navigation question

Why is “knowing where a place is” different from possessing a reliable route to it? Consider season, wind, landmarks, provisioning, return voyage and accumulated navigational knowledge.

10. First contact and cultural encounter

First contact is a recurring test of judgement. Neither side can know the other's intentions, language, rules or expectations. Students can analyse how characters communicate before fluent speech is possible.

Close-reading prompts

- What signals are used to show peaceful intent?
- Which gestures could be misunderstood?
- How do gifts differ from trade?
- When does an interpreter gain power?
- What information does each side try to conceal?
- How does repeated contact change the balance between fear and curiosity?

Role-play

Two groups meet. Neither may use a shared spoken language for the first five minutes. Each has a secret objective and one item it is willing to exchange. Afterwards, identify what students inferred correctly, what they misread and which signals carried the most information.

DEBRIEF

The point is not to imitate any particular culture. Keep the scenario abstract and focus on communication under uncertainty.

11. Selected chapter discussion guide

The final proof contains seventy chapters, moving from Arrival and Survival through Trade, Education, The Waka Hourua, Pacific landfalls and the Java trading arc, ending with Another Giant Falls.

Ch. 1 - Arrival What must be solved immediately? Which problems can wait? What assumptions does leadership require?

Ch. 6 - First Contact How does uncertainty change behaviour on both sides? What prevents violence?

Ch. 10 - The Thunder of the Hill How should leaders make decisions when survival pressures conflict with individual agency and modern readers' values?

Ch. 19 - Talking to the Future Why does preserving knowledge matter to a society whose population is still small?

Ch. 23 - Trade What changes when exchange becomes a deliberate strategy rather than an occasional event?

Ch. 25 - Education Why might systematic teaching be an economic and political technology?

Ch. 26 - The Waka Hourua How does a larger ocean-going vessel alter the limits of the possible?

Ch. 28 - Treachery What does betrayal reveal about the limits of alliance and trust?

Ch. 37 - Fortress Te Pāhokohoko What does fortification protect, and what does it cost?

Ch. 38 - Landfall How should strangers behave when they enter another people's territory?

Ch. 50 - Tūhua How can control of a resource change a trading network?

Ch. 63 - The Crossroads of the Sea How does encountering an established regional trade network change the voyagers' understanding of scale?

Ch. 66 - The Harbour Rules Why would traders willingly surrender a share of cargo for access, safety and rules?

Ch. 67 - The Weight of Gold Why can knowledge be more valuable than the goods being traded?

Ch. 69 - A Foothold in Civilisation What are the risks of creating a permanent base far from home?

Ch. 70 - Another Giant Falls What does Te Rangatira's final choice about leadership reveal about his idea of the motu?

12. English: character, structure and voice

Character study

Choose Te Rangatira, Whetu, Tautai or Pākiki. Track the character across at least five chapters. For each appearance, identify what the character wants, what obstructs them, what they learn and whether their values change.

Narrative structure

The novel moves from local survival to increasingly wide geographic and political horizons. Identify three points where the scale of the story expands. How does the author prepare the reader for each expansion?

Recurring ideas

- The horizon as possibility and danger.
- The sea as road, barrier and source of uncertainty.
- Counting, recording and measurement as forms of power.
- Knowledge passed between generations.
- The tension between home and exploration.

Creative task

Write 600-800 words from the perspective of a person who sees one of the voyagers' innovations for the first time. The narrator must misunderstand at least one aspect initially, then revise that judgement through observation.

13. Writing and assessment tasks

Alternative-history essay

Identify one decision in the novel that functions as a major divergence point. Explain the consequences of the decision and evaluate whether the later outcome is plausible within the rules established by the novel.

Leadership essay

“Te Rangatira’s greatest achievement is not exploration but cooperation.” Discuss, using detailed evidence from the novel.

Economics essay

Does trade create more durable wealth and power than conquest in *The Rising Tide*?

Geography report

Choose one major voyage. Explain how distance, weather, provisioning, navigation and destination resources shape the decisions made.

English close reading

Select a passage in which the characters encounter something unfamiliar. Analyse how imagery, pacing and point of view create a sense of discovery or uncertainty.

Research challenge

Choose one technology, resource, location or trade practice from the novel. Research the historical evidence and produce a two-column evaluation: “supported by evidence” and “fictional extrapolation”.

14. Sensitive topics and classroom framing

The novel contains warfare, death, famine and hunger, political coercion, intertribal conflict, arranged or strategic marriages, kidnapping, unequal power relationships and decisions that may conflict with modern expectations of individual autonomy.

These elements should be discussed as part of the novel's imagined fourteenth-century setting, not presented as timeless or universal Māori practices. The book itself is explicit that its characters, iwi and events are fictional.

Suggested approach

- Distinguish understanding a character's reasoning from approving it.
- Ask what alternatives were available within the situation presented by the novel.
- Invite students to identify whose perspective is missing from a decision.
- Avoid generalising fictional iwi behaviour to Māori society as a whole.
- When historical claims arise, return to reliable historical sources rather than treating the novel as evidence.

CHAPTER 10 DISCUSSION

The famine-era decisions in "The Thunder of the Hill" are particularly suitable for discussing agency, survival ethics and the difference between historical understanding and moral approval. Teachers may wish to preview this chapter before assigning it to younger students.

15. Curriculum connections

The guide is designed for flexible use across Years 10–13. The connections below describe genuine classroom applications; they are not claims that the novel itself satisfies any particular assessment standard.

Learning area	Possible applications
English	Characterisation; theme; narrative structure; close reading; viewpoint; creative and persuasive writing.
Social Sciences / History	Historical thinking; causation; continuity and change; perspectives; cultural interaction; evidence versus interpretation.
Geography	Navigation; spatial relationships; resources; environment; hazards; transport networks; location and connectivity.
Economics	Scarcity; incentives; opportunity cost; specialisation; comparative advantage; trade; productive capacity.
Business Studies	Enterprise; supply chains; risk; investment; human capital; logistics; negotiation and exchange.

Assessment design principle

Where the novel is used in assessed work, make the assessed skill explicit: textual analysis, historical reasoning, economic explanation, geographic analysis or research evaluation. Students should not be rewarded simply for recalling plot.

16. Author-visit lesson sequence

Before the visit

1. Run the “eighty people on a beach” activity without revealing the novel’s decisions.
2. Ask each group to prepare one question about a decision they found difficult.
3. Read a selected early chapter or extract chosen by the teacher.

During the visit

- Compare student priorities with the choices in the novel.
- Discuss how an alternative-history author decides what may change and what must remain constrained.
- Explore the practical problems of boats, food, population, technology and trade.
- Invite students to challenge one decision and propose a better one.

After the visit

- Write a revised survival plan incorporating what students learned.
- Choose one fictional development and fact-check its historical foundation.
- Debate whether the society’s greatest strategic asset is population, technology, trade, ships or knowledge.

FOR SCHOOLS

Class-set, library-copy and author-visit enquiries can be directed to South Seas Publishing through SouthSeasPublishing.com.

17. Reproducible worksheet: decision matrix

Decision	Benefit	Risk	People/ resources required	What happens if delayed?

Reflection

Which decision has the highest cost if you get it wrong?

Which decision creates the greatest long-term benefit?

What information do you most wish you had?

18. Reproducible worksheet: trade and value

Good/ resource	Who has it?	Who wants it?	Why scarce?	Transport/ risk cost	Likely bargaining power

Questions

- Which good has the greatest value-to-weight ratio? Why does that matter on a waka?
- Which exchange appears mutually beneficial?
- Where does one side possess information the other does not?
- How would a safer or faster route change prices and bargaining power?

19. Reproducible worksheet: testing alternative history

Choose one development from The Rising Tide and test it rather than simply accepting or rejecting it.

Fictional development	
Historical starting point	
What must be true for it to happen?	
What resources/skills are required?	
What could prevent it?	
Evidence I would need to research	
My judgement: plausible / possible but unlikely / unsupported	

Final question

Does finding one implausible step invalidate the entire alternative history? Explain the difference between a fictional premise and a chain of consequences.

20. Key concepts for students

Alternative history	Fiction that explores consequences flowing from a changed historical event or decision.
Comparative advantage	The benefit of specialising in what one can produce at lower opportunity cost and trading for other goods.
Human capital	Knowledge and skills embodied in people.
Opportunity cost	The best alternative given up when a choice is made.
Productive capacity	The ability of a society to produce goods and services using its people, skills, resources and tools.
Specialisation	Concentrating labour or resources on particular tasks.
Trade network	Connected routes and relationships through which goods, information and people move.
Wayfinding	Navigation using environmental knowledge and observation rather than modern instruments.
Waka hourua	A double-hulled voyaging canoe.
Iwi	Tribe; use the novel's glossary and classroom context for fuller meaning.

For Māori vocabulary used in the story, students should consult the glossary in the novel itself.

21. Teacher planning page

My learning focus: _____

Chapters/extracts I will use: _____

Historical sources students will compare with the novel:

Sensitive content I will preview: _____

Assessment/product: _____

Questions for the author: _____

CENTRAL QUESTION

What makes a society strong: numbers, weapons, wealth, knowledge, cooperation - or the ability to combine them?

THE RISING TIDE

William F. Porter

Published by South Seas Publishing • First edition 2026 • ISBN 978-0-473-79565-8

SouthSeasPublishing.com

*This teacher guide may be printed and copied by schools for classroom use in connection with
The Rising Tide.*